NATION

Stalin moves resolutions against '1 Nation, 1 Election'

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BUSINESS

Markets extend gainson fag-end buying

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SPORTS

India seeks quick middle-order solutions against England

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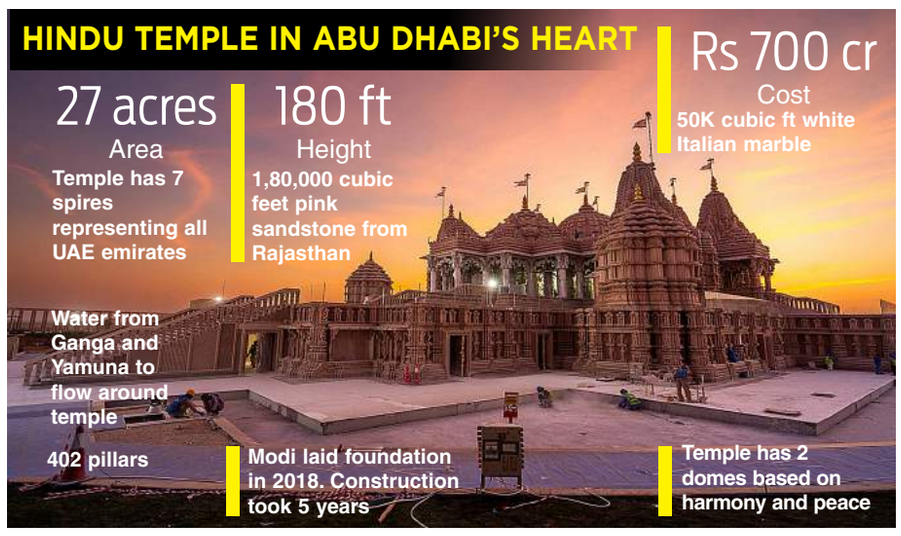
PM opens Abu Dhabi's 1st Hindu stone temple

He says it is symbol of shared heritage of humanity


HINDU TEMPLE IN ABU DHABI'S HEART
27 acres
Area
Temple has 7 spires representing all UAE emirates
180 ft
Height
1,80,000 cubic feet pink sandstone from Rajasthan
Rs 700 cr
Cost
50K cubic ft white Italian marble
Water from Ganga and Yamuna to flow around temple
402 pillars
Modi laid foundation in 2018. Construction took 5 years
Temple has 2 domes based on harmony and peace

ABU DHABI, 14 FEB

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday inaugurated Abu Dhabi's first Hindu stone temple, describing it as a symbol of shared heritage of humanity.

Speaking at the inauguration of the temple built by the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS), he thanked UAE President Sheikh Mohammad Zayed Al Nahyan for making the temple a reality and said he has won the hearts of 140 crore Indians.

"I hope that the BAPS Mandir will become a symbol of communal harmony and global unity for the whole world," Modi told a gathering that included UAE Tolerance Minister Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak Al Nahyan. "We do not see hatred in diversity, we consider diversity as our specialty! In this temple, we will see a glimpse of diverse faiths at each and every step," Modi said.

"It is my good fortune that I have been a witness to the grand Shri Ram temple first in Ayodhya, and then to this temple in Abu Dhabi," he said. The temple has been made in Nagara style of architecture, just like the recently inaugurated Ram Temple in Ayodhya.

"Not just the stone, many labourers who helped construct the temple over five years belong to Gujarat and Rajasthan. Even the marble mined from Italy was first shipped to India for carving and then back to the UAE to be used in the interiors," Umesh Raja, a volunteer at the temple, said.

Modi's visit raises hope for USD 100 billion bilateral trade Buoyed by the signing of the key Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement, India and the UAE on Wednesday expressed optimism that the bilateral trade will be elevated to USD 100 billion "well ahead of the target year of 2030".

UAE is India's third-largest trading partner for 2022-23 and India's second-largest export destination. India is the UAE's second-largest trading partner, with the bilateral trade rising to USD 85 billion in 2022-23.

It also listed the eight bilateral pacts that the two nations entered into. Those included, among others, the Bilateral Investment Treaty and the Inter-Governmental Framework Agreement on the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 4

Narendra Modi during the inauguration of the BAPS Hindu Mandir **PHOTO: PTI**

BHARAT MART IN DUBAI FOR INDIANS

- It is a warehousing facility for Indian MSMEs to trade in Dubai
- Platform for Indian exporters to showcase products
- A hub to support exports of made-in-India products
- To be operational by 2025
- Area: 100,000sq m
- Will house retail showrooms, offices, warehouses
- Will counter China's 'Dragon Mart'
- After launch, users from around the globe can buy products online

Burj Khalifa lit up in Indian tricolour with words "Guest of Honor -the Republic of India" in Dubai, UAE, on Tuesday **PHOTO: PTI**

Farmers brave more police force, tear gas

After dead-end, Centre ropes in Rajnath Singh for talks

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

Haryana security personnel lobbed tear gas shells on farmers from Punjab at Shambhu border between the two States as thousands of protesters stayed put there today, the second day of their 'Delhi Chalo' march.

New Delhi has been turned into a fortress with police and other security personnel blocking roads with concrete blocks, barbed wires and tyre-busting spikes.

The 'Delhi Chalo' protest was started to pressure on BJP-led Centre for farmers' demands, including a law on a minimum support price (MSP) for crops and loan waivers. The Centre had made it clear that announcing a guaranteed MSP will not be possible.

Haryana police forcefully stopped farmers from travelling to Delhi on their tractor-trolleys nears Data Singhwala-Khanauri border in Jind district.

Talks with the agitating farmers have so far remained inconclusive. Hence, Centre has roped in Defence Minister Rajnath Singh to assist in finding a resolution to the issues of farmers.

Sources said Union Agriculture Minister Arjun Munda met Singh--a farmer leader from Uttar Pradesh and former agriculture minister--at his residence.

Besides Munda, Food and Consumer Affairs Minister Piyush Goyal - whose ministry procures foodgrains at government-announced minimum support price - and Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai were to hold talks with the agitating farmer leaders over video conferencing on Wednesday but the meeting has now been pushed to Thursday.

Farmer groups and the ministerial delegation are likely to hold a physical meeting in Chandigarh on Thursday.

The police have deployed a drone to keep an eye on the protesting farmers

While the protesting farmers said on Wednesday that they were determined to march towards the national capital, many young farmers have made their tractors ready for removing the multi-layered cemented blocks at the Shambhu border. They have also arranged water tankers in order to minimise the impact of any tear gas shell lobbed by the Haryana security personnel.

The farmers were also carrying water bottles and wet clothes to limit the impact of the tear gas shells. Many farmers said they sustained injuries, faced difficulties in breathing and had irritation in the eyes because of the tear gas shells. *—PTI*

Police use tear gas to disperse farmers gathered at the Punjab-Haryana Shambhu border in Patiala **PHOTO: PTI**

Farmers to squat on rail tracks today

Bharti Kisan Union (Ekta Ugrahan) announced that farmers would squat on rail tracks at seven places in Punjab on Thursday in protest against the Haryana Police action against protesting farmers at the borders. BKU (Ekta Ugrahan) president Joginder Singh Ugrahan said their agitation will be held from 12 noon to 4 pm. BKU (Ekta Ugrahan), which is a member of the Samyukta Kisan Morcha, is not part of the 'Delhi Chalo' call. Ugrahan said they were also against preventing farmers from heading towards by sealing the borders. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page3

1 killed in Manipur as 'village volunteers' attempt to barge into cops' college

IMPHAL, 14 FEB

At least one person was killed as security personnel opened fire to disperse a large number of 'village volunteers' who allegedly attempted to barge into the Manipur Police Training College (MPTC) at Pangei in Imphal East district, a senior official said.

It is suspected that the village volunteers tried to barge into the premises to loot firearms as they had earlier posted on social media that they needed more weapons to fight off attackers. However, officials have remained mum over the motive of their attempt to enter the police facility, which houses a large number of weapons. *—PTI*

Pak Rangers violate ceasefire along IB in Jammu

JAMMU, 14 FEB

Pakistan Rangers on Wednesday violated ceasefire agreement by resorting to unprovoked firing at a Border Security Force (BSF) post along the International Border here, officials said. BSF personnel manning the border outpost in Makwal retaliated befittingly to the firing from across the border, with the exchange lasting for over 20 minutes, beginning at 5.50 pm, officials said. They said there was no casualty or damage on the Indian side.Last year, on the intervening night of 8-9 November, a BSF jawan was killed in Pakistan Rangers firing in Ramgarh sector of Samba district . *—PTI*

Driverless Metros from China reach Bengaluru

BENGALURU, 14 FEB

The much-anticipated first driverless metro train arrived at the Hebbagodi Depot on Hosur Road, on Wednesday. The train will operate on the Yellow Line of the BMRCL from RV Road to Electronic City via Silk Board.

The train and coaches are built by a Chinese firm, CRRC Nanjing Puzhen Co Ltd. According to the BMRCL Public Relations Officer (PRO), Shrivas the project was initiated in 2019 and had faced setbacks due to the pandemic and complexities in manufacturing. This prototype is a Communication Based Train Control and is a significant milestone for Electronics City Metro project and paves way for advanced public transportation. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: PTI

Not Nawaz or Bilawal, but Shehbaz likely new Pak PM

ISLAMABAD, 14 FEB

Shehbaz Sharif, the younger brother of former premier Nawaz Sharif, is expected to become Pakistan's new prime minister as the coalition of leading political parties led by them is set to comfortably cross the simple majority mark to form the next government after elections produced a split mandate.

Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) on Tuesday night nominated Shehbaz as the prime ministerial candidate instead of the party supremo and three-time former premier Nawaz.

Shehbaz Sharif **PHOTO: PTI**

PML-N Information Secretary Marriyum Aurangzeb has said that party supremo Nawaz has nominated his younger brother Shehbaz, 72, for the post of the country's Prime Minister.

She added that PML-N Senior Vice President Maryam Nawaz was nominated for the post of Punjab's Chief Minister. Shehbaz who was prime minister after the Imran-led government was ousted in April 2022, said the other parties that joined hands with the PML-N enjoyed "almost 2/3 majority" of the Parliament after the elections. According to the Election Commission of Pakistan's (ECP) tally, the total number of general seats won by the six parties -- the PML-N, PPP, MQM-P, PML-Q, IPP and Balochistan Awami Party (BAP) which announced their plans to form a coalition led by Shehbaz -- comes to 152. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 6

Trouble mounts as Kejri gets 6th ED summon

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

Enforcement Directorate(ED) has issued the sixth summons to Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal for questioning him in the excise policy-linked money laundering case, official sources said on Wednesday.

Kejriwal has been asked to depose before the federal agency on February 19.

Acting on a complaint filed by the ED for disobeying its summons in this case, a Delhi court last week had asked Kejriwal to appear before it Saturday and noted that prima facie the AAP Chief was "legally bound" to comply.

In its complaint, ED claimed that Kejriwal was summoned for probe on numerous occasions in order to unearth the role of others, including him, and to trace further proceeds of crime in the ongoing investigation.

ED claimed that Kejriwal intentionally disobeyed each summons and made each of such omission or disobedience a separate offence.

This is the sixth summons in this case by the ED to the former Indian Revenue Service (IRS) officer.

He was earlier called on 21 December and 2 November 2 in 2023 and 3 January, 18 January and 2 February this year. *—PTI*

Official transferred over teacher making communal remarks

MANGALURU, 14 FEB

The government has transferred D Ramachandra Naik, deputy director of public instruction (DDPI) in Dakshina Kannada district, apparently in view of the controversy over the removal of a teacher from a private school in the city following her alleged ant-Hindu' remarks in the class room. Naik has been transferred as a lecturer at a government teachers' college in Belagavi, an official communique said. He has been replaced by Venkatesh Subraya Patagara, who has been serving as the deputy director at the office of the additional commissioner, school education department at Kalaburagi.*—PTI*

K'taka Cong to hold 1 more survey before finalising LS list

BENGALURU, 14 FEB

Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar indicated on Wednesday that the party would finalise candidates for the Lok Sabha elections in the state after another round of survey on the prospects of potential nominees.

Shivakumar, who is also Congress' State Unit President, said he had a meeting with Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and AICC General Secretary and the party's Karnataka in-charge Randeep Singh Surjewala among others, here.

"Today we had a discussion on the survey reports submitted by our district secretaries and party workers. We will ask them to do another round of survey. Then we will take a decision," he said. Shivakumar said the next meeting will be in New Delhi. *—PTI*

Randeep Surjewala, DK Shivakumar and Siddaramaiah during Lok Sabha candidates meet, in Bengaluru **PHOTO: SALAR**

SINGH'S 33-YEAR JOURNEY

Sonia in RS as Manmohan ends stint

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

Former prime minister and Congress leader Manmohan Singh will end his 33-year-long parliamentary innings in the Rajya Sabha in early April, just as former party chief Sonia Gandhi enters the Upper House of Parliament for the first time.

Singh, who is known for ushering in several bold reforms in the economy, became a member of the House for the first time in October 1991. He was finance minister in the Narasimha Rao government from 1991 to 1996 and the prime minister from 2004 to 2014.

Sonia will enter the upper house from Rajasthan, filling the seat that will fall vacant after 91-year-old Singh completes his tenure on 3 April. Sonia filed her nomination papers in Jaipur on Wednesday. She will be the second member of the Gandhi family to enter the Rajya Sabha after former prime minister and her mother-in-law Indira Gandhi, who had a two-and-a-half-year tenure as a member of the House.

Sonia has always been a member of the Lok Sabha, beginning 1999. In that year, she had contested from Uttar Pradesh's Amethi, her first general election after taking over as the President of Congress a year before. Singh, who first became a Rajya Sabha member in 1991 after becoming the finance minister in the Rao government, had unsuccessfully contested the 1999 Lok Sabha elections from South Delhi. Singh has often been accused by the BJP for running a government that was marred by corruption. The party had also termed "MaunMohan Singh", alleging he did not speak out against corrupt leaders. *—PTI*

Manmohan Singh; Sonia Gandhi files her nomination papers for Rajya Sabha polls, in Jaipur, Wednesday **PHOTO: PTI**

HSRP installation deadline extended by 3 months

BENGALURU, 14 FEB

Transport Minister Ramalinga Reddy has announced a three-month extension for the deadline to install High Security Registration Plates (HSRP) as a large number of vehicles, especially in rural areas, are yet to install the number plates."There are more than two crore vehicles in the State and a lot of villagers still have to install HSRP nameplates on the vehicles," said MLC Madhu G Madhegowda in Legislative Council on Wednesday. In August 2023, the State issued a notification mandating HSRP for about two crore vehicles registered before 1 April, 2019. It set a deadline of 17 November, 2023, which was extended till 17 February, 2024.—*Salar News*

Konkan Rly gets ₹2cr in fine for ticketless travel

MANGALURU, 14 FEB

Konkan Railway Corporation Limited (KRCL) has recovered over Rs 2.17 crore in fines from 9,548 ticketless travellers in January this year as a result of Konkan Railway's ticket-checking drives.In January this year, a total of 9,548 unauthorised or irregular travellers were detected without tickets and were penalised. A total of Rs 2,17,97,102 was recovered in fines, officials of KRCL said.Konkan Railway has appealed to passengers to travel with proper and valid tickets to avoid inconvenience, as KRCL will continue to hold such ticket-checking drives intensively along its route. —*PTI*

Drying Bhutnal Lake worries Vijayapura

VIJAYAPURA, 14 FEB

The water shortage in Vijayapura due to poor monsoon has worsened with the drying up of Bhutnal Lake, a vital water source for City's residents. With the lake rendered dry, residents are forced to rely on alternative water sources, including Kolhara, the backwaters of Alamatti Reservoir.The diminishing water levels in both the backwaters of Alamatti Reservoir and Bhutnal Lake pose challenges to the city's water supply infrastructure. Previously, drinking water was sourced from Bhutnal Lake for five wards within the city. Now, with the lake completely devoid of water, concerns mount over how residents in these wards will access essential water supplies in the coming days. Shivrudra Bagalkota, a member of Vijayapura municipal council, called for unified efforts to resolve the crisis, transcending political affiliations. Satish Patil, a resident, demanded releasing water from Alamatti Reservoir to replenish Bhootana Lake.
—*Salar News*

KSRTC compensates families of 12 dead workers

BENGALURU, 14 FEB

Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) has given Rs 1 crore as a relief to the families of 12 deceased employees since November 2023.KSRTC introduced a Rs 1 crore accident insurance scheme to financially support dependents of employees who die or become disabled in on-duty or off-duty accidents. KSRTC even increased the family welfare relief compensation from 3 lakh to Rs 10 lakh for non-accident related employee deaths due to heart attack and cancer. Nearly 16 families who have lost their families since November 2023 have benefited from this. KSRTC has also partnered with Sri Jayadeva Institute of Cardiology for free check-ups for employees aged 40 and above, for the next five years.
—*Salar News*

Sparks fly in Assembly over Ram Temple & flag issue

Ashoka alleges deterioration of law and order situation in the State

BENGALURU, 14 FEB

Legislative Assembly on Wednesday witnessed heated exchanges between Opposition BJP and ruling Congress members on Ram Temple and Hanuman flag issue during a debate on the law-and-order situation in State.

Listing out various incidents, Leader of Opposition R Ashoka targeted the Siddaramaiah administration, alleging deterioration of law and order situation in the State, during the discussion on the motion of thanks to the Governor's address to the joint sitting of the State Legislature.

As Ashoka referred to the arrest of Shrikanth Pujari in connection with a 1992 violence case during the Ram Janmabhoomi agitation, ahead of the consecration of the Lord Ram Lalla idol at the temple in Ayodhya, calling him a "Kar Sevak," the Congress members objected stating that Pujari had a criminal background and was involved in Matka related cases. Congress members claimed the BJP was insulting real Kar Sevaks and were giving a new definition for Kar Sevak, by using the term while referring to him.

Following this, there was a slugfest between the two sides as several BJP members alleged that the Congress governments had filed false cases against those involved in Ram Janmabhoomi agitation and Kar Sevaks in the past.

Leader of Opposition R Ashoka **PHOTO: PTI**

Bengaluru Cybercrime Capital of India: Ashoka

Ashoka said Bengaluru is the cybercrime capital of the country and City's residents lost Rs 432 crore to the menace in 2023.

According to National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), there was a 46 per cent increase in crimes in State after Congress government came to power, the BJP leader said. "Karnataka now stands at third position in the country in crimes against women. The law and order in this State has gone for a toss; people committing crimes are not being punished effectively," he added.

About NIA arresting eight people in December 2023 in the State on charges of involvement in bomb preparations and promoting terror acts, Ashoka said Minaz alias Mohammed Sulaiman, the prime accused, attracted innocent college students through religious traps by offering money and job. "Until the NIA cracked down, the State police did nothing about such anti-social elements," the BJP Leader said.

Crimes against women

Ashoka also brought up Belagavi woman rape case and Hangal case in the Assembly. "We were all there in Belagavi for Winter Session when the incident took place, but none of us knew. The police hid the case; when the woman was harassed on the road, where were the police? Do not they have any informers?" Ashoka questioned.

Home Minister G Parmeshwara said he visited the woman the next day morning in the hospital and the accused were arrested within 24 hours.

E-Swathu portal

Chikkamagaluru Congress MLA HD Thimmaiah raised the issue of properties not registered in E-Swathu online portal. Thimmaiah said 2,543 properties were not registered in E-Swathu portal but they are present in the register of the zilla chairman, Thimmaiah said. Rural Development and Panchayat Raj and IT and BT Minister PriyankKharge said the problem is persistent in many districts and they will take the support of the Revenue Department to fix the issue.

Sports City in Yelahanka

Minister of Youth Services, Sports and ST Welfare B Nagendra said a Sports City spread across 100 acres will be built in Yelahanka and it will include coaching centres, hostels and facilities to train athletes.

Purchase of copra

Sugarcane Development Minister Shivanand Patil said the purchase of copra from farmers by the State government has been postponed until next week. Though the number of coconut growers is maximum in Tumakuru, the registrations to sell the copra have been highest in Hassan. Patil said legal action will be taken against people who are faking as farmers to sell copra. —*Salar News*

ASHOKA SLAMS GOVT'S GUARANTEE SCHEMES

BENGALURU, 14 FEB

Ashoka claimed that the guarantee schemes have put the State 20 years back. While opposing the governor's speech at the commencement of the Assembly, Ashoka said to run the Shakti scheme, they had reduced the number of buses and cancelled many routes. Gruha Lakshmi scheme has been inconsistent in payment to beneficiaries and "people come to us asking for the money," he said. "If you cannot maintain the consistency, then do not make these promises," Ashoka said. Regarding the GruhaJyothi scheme, Ashoka said they are giving 200 units free but increasing the electricity prices. In the Anna Bhagya scheme, the State government is distributing rice from the Central government's quota, he said. —*Salar News*

CENTRAL GOVT SCHEME

Use Bharat brand rice: Pratap Simmha

MYSURU, 14 FEB

Central government launched the distribution of rice under the 'Bharat' brand to provide the staple food at affordable rates to the needy, Mysuru MP Pratap Simmha said here on Wednesday during the launch of the scheme.

"The Central government has initiated the Bharat brand scheme to offer rice to economically weaker sections at the affordable rate of Rs 29/kg," the MP said while distributing rice in 10kg packs to the public.

The BJP leader said the chances of misuse of the scheme are minimal. "Rice distribution is carried out after obtaining the mobile number of the beneficiary and issuing a token to ensure accountability and transparency. With direct reporting to the central office, the risk of misuse is minimised."

Pratap Simmha **PHOTO: X/ PRATAP SIMMHA**

He said, "This scheme has been rolled out nationwide, and the public's response has been encouraging. I urge everyone to take advantage of this opportunity."

He said in addition to mobile vehicles, Bharat brand rice will be available for Rs 29/kg on online shopping platforms, including Reliance Mart, Flipkart and Blinkit.

—*Salar News*

BJP leader gets life threat; BBMP ex-corporator held

BENGALURU, 14 FEB

Bruhat Bengaluru MahanagaraPalike (BBMP) ex-corporator Padmaraj was arrested on Wednesday for issuing a death threat to BJP MLA and former minister K Gopalaiah on Tuesday night.

Gopalaiah told the Legislative Assembly that he and his family have received death threats and demanded protection.

The former corporator during the investigation claimed that he called Gopalaiah on Tuesday to ask for his money, but Gopalaiah hurled abuses at him. Padmaraj also said that Leader of Opposition in Assembly R Ashoka during BJP's tenure demanded Rs 1 crore from him for the mayor's post.

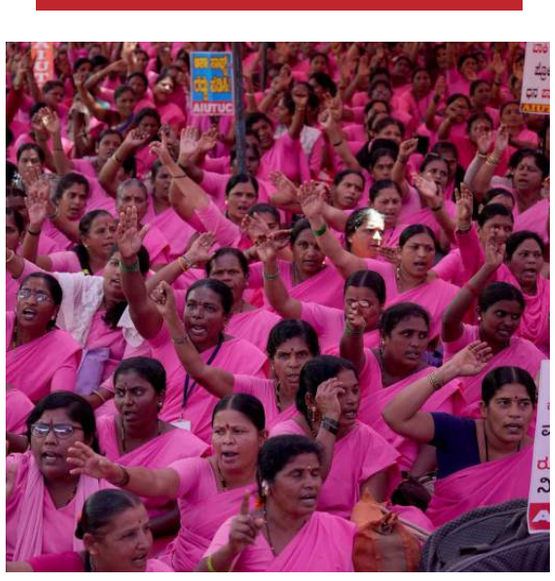
During the Zero Hour in the Assembly, Gopalaiah sought security for himself and his family.

Gopalaiah said a complaint was filed at 11 pm on Tuesday and the police went to Padmaraj's house but did not make any arrests, despite, him being inside.

Ashoka and BJP MLA Suresh Kumar also said that they received death threats from Padmaraj too. BJP leaders complained that he owns pubs in Basaveshwaranagar limits and is "intoxicated" with the money he gains from it.

—*Salar News*

2ND DAY OF PROTEST



Members of Karnataka State Asha Karyakartheyara Sangha continued their protest for the second day demanding Rs 15,000 as honorarium among other demands, at Freedom Park in Bengaluru on Wednesday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

Teachers' constituency polls: 14K to cast vote

BENGALURU, 14 FEB

Bengaluru teachers' constituency elections are set to take place on 16 February. The voting will start at 8 am and will go on until 4 pm. There are a total of 43 polling stations in the City and 14,432 voters.

The mustering /de-mustering and counting centres will be set up in Government Arts College on Nrupathunga Road, AmbedkarVeedhi, KR Circle and Sampangiram Nagar.

BBMP Commissioner Tushar Girinath who is also the District Election Officer, announced that section 144 will be in force near polling booths and no more than five people will be allowed within 100 meters of the polling station. Campaigning will not be allowed within 100 meters of the polling station.

Special holidays have been declared for voters on the day of the election. This will be the first major test for BJP and JD(S) who have allied for the Lok Sabha polls.

JD(S) has nominated AP Ranganath, the longtime president of its legal cell, while Congress has fielded four-time former MLC Puttanna, who lost in the Assembly polls from Rajajinagar. Chief Minister Siddaramaiah expressed confidence in Puttanna's ability to secure victory, citing his track record and support from teachers.
—*Salar News*

Siddaramaiah **PHOTO: PTI**

Siddaramaiah approaches SC in protest march case

BENGALURU, 14 FEB

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Wednesday approached Supreme Court challenging Karnataka High Court order of 6 February rejecting the plea to quash the criminal proceeding against him in a protest march case.

A case was filed against Siddaramaiah and other Congress leaders for protesting against former minister KS Eshwarappa in the streets and disrupting public life on 14 February 2022. The plea submitted to SC reads that the present proceedings are an abuse of the process of law that would lead to undue harassment on the basis of vague allegations.

Siddaramaiah said the incident lasted for almost an hour and no violence or use of criminal force has been reported against any member of the procession. It is thus submitted that the prosecution cannot be allowed to continue on such frivolous incidents where no allegation of criminality has been attributed to any of the members of the Assembly.
—*Salar News*

NOW, LIQUOR BAN IN CITY ONLY ON 16 & 20 FEBRUARY

BENGALURU, 14 FEB

High Court has modified the ban on the sale of liquor in the City in view of the upcoming byelection to Bengaluru Teachers' Constituency in Legislative Council.Now, the sale of liquor will only be prohibited from 6am to midnight on 16 February on polling day and from 6am to midnight on 20 February, on the counting day. The court observed that the previous restriction was not necessary for ensuring free and fair polling, especially considering that the voters were teachers. Earlier, the Excise Department enforced the ban from 5pm on 14 February to 6am on 17 February and on 20 February. However, restaurant owners challenged this rule, claiming it was illegal. The petition, represented by advocate Arun Shyam, said only 16,000 voters are eligible to participate in the Teachers' Constituency election. Consequently, a 48-hour liquor ban would disproportionately impact traders and business people. —*Salar News*

PHOTO: X

Inter-state ATM robber gang busted, 3 held

BIDAR, 14 FEB

An inter-state robber gang from Mewat in Haryana which had looted 12 ATMs in Karnataka, Maharashtra and Telangana was busted with the arrest of three members, police said on Wednesday.Mewati gang had stolen Rs 1.58 crore cash from automated teller machines (ATMs), police said. Those arrested are Shahid Kamaal Khan, 45, of Navali in Nuh, Alim Akbar Khan, 26, of Bhango in Nuh and Ilyas Abdul Rehman, 45, of Mathepur in Palwal, Haryana.These people would move around in a car and break ATMs using gas cutters and machine tools including spanners. A team comprising police personnel from Telangana, Karnataka and Maharashtra is being sent to Haryana to arrest the four absconding people, Bidar Superintendent of Police ChennabasavannaLangoti said.

- These people would move around in a car and break ATMs using gas cutters and machine tools including spanners

"We have produced the arrested in court and taken them into police custody. Those who harboured them have also been booked as accused," Langoti said.According to him, the criminals would flee to Osmanabad (Dharashiv) district on the Karnataka-Maharashtra border after committing the crime, where they would meet in a shed on the outskirts and hatch their next plan. "We have recovered Rs 9.5 lakh from them but the total loot is Rs 1.58 crore," the SP said.
—*PTI*

UNPAID DUES OF ₹11CR

BBMP seals Rockline Mall

BENGALURU, 14 FEB

Bruhat Bengaluru MahanagaraPalike (BBMP) has shut down Rockline Mall in Dasarahalli over a tax dispute.

The mall, owned by Kannada movie producer Rockline Venkatesh, owed Rs 11.51 crores in taxes since 2011.

BBMP officials have warned that other malls with pending dues will also face similar action.

The civic body plans to shut down more establishments with unsettled tax payments.

Venkatesh has claimed that the tax dispute arose due to incorrect calculations by BBMP officials. He said that the matter was previously settled in High Court, with the tax amount fixed accordingly. However, BBMP officials made incorrect calculations, resulting in an increased tax amount that cannot be paid.

BBMP officials have also warned that other malls with pending dues will also face similar action **PHOTO: X**

He said, "Rockline Mall has only three floors, with commercial businesses on two floors and a multiplex on the third floor, totalling an area of 48,500 square feet. However, BBMP officials consider the mall to have six floors, with a total area of 1,22,743 square feet. Venkatesh has contested the BBMP's calculation, particularly regarding the multiplex, which they consider as four stories due to its height."

- In December 2023, Mantri Square Mall was shut down for owing Rs 51 crore in tax arrears

In December 2023, Mantri Square Mall was shut down for owing Rs 51 crore in tax arrears.
—*Salar News*

C'magaluru students forced to study under street lamps

C'MAGALURU, 14 FEB

Students of a government residential school in NR Pura taluk of Chikkamagaluru district have been studying under solar street lamps due to the lack of electricity for the last three months. DevarajUrs Backward Classes Welfare Department Girls' Residential School at Kaimara has come under scrutiny after a video depicting the ordeal went viral, prompting residents to express their dissatisfaction with the government's handling of the situation.

With SSLC and second PUC exams looming next month, parents are anxious about their children's ability to study if power cuts continue due to load-shedding measures. This has also raised concerns about the safety of the girls, and questions have been raised about accountability in the event of any issues arising.

PHOTO: SALAR

The villagers are urging the government to install Uninterruptible Power Supply (UPS) systems in the school, which accommodates over 65 girls. The hostel staff had submitted requests for resolution.

Somasekhar, Deputy Director of the Backward Classes Welfare Department, said the hostel will get an uninterrupted power supply within a month once it is connected to urban power lines. "The NR Pura Post Matric Girls' Hostel is a newly constructed facility. While the hostel currently has access to rural electric lines, efforts are underway to connect it to urban power lines. Tenders have been called and it is expected to be finalised within a month. In the interim, a UPS battery has been provided to the dormitory, offering backup power for 4-5 hours. Due to recent prolonged power outages, the battery was not fully charged, forcing students to rely on the street lamp for around half an hour before electricity was restored and the battery recharged."
—*Salar News*

Jarange's fast on for 5th day; health deteriorates

JALNA, 14 FEB

The health condition of Maratha quota agitation spearhead Manoj Jarange, whose indefinite fast entered the fifth day on Wednesday, is deteriorating, but he is not allowing doctors to examine him, an activist Kishor Markad, close to him said. Jarange has been observing the indefinite fast at his native Antarwali Sarati village in Jalna district of Maharashtra demanding inclusion of the Maratha community into Other Backward Class grouping. Talking to reporters from the protest site, Jarange warned the state government that in case he dies during his hunger strike, the members of the Maratha community would set Maharashtra on fire just the way Lord Hanuman did to Lanka. "His nose is bleeding, but he is not letting doctors examine him. He is neither consuming water not taking his medicines," he said. *—PTI*

Nagaland CM seeks support to improve education quality

KOHIMA, 14 FEB

Asserting that there has been a "gradual deterioration" in the quality of education despite appointments of highly qualified teachers in all government schools, Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio on Wednesday sought the support of all stakeholders of the sector. Despite having a literacy rate of almost 80 per cent, Naga youths are unable to get jobs because of the lack of skill-based education, he said. Rio was speaking at a function at a school in Meriema on the outskirts of Kohima, which has recently been upgraded to a high school. "In all government schools, highly qualified teachers are appointed. However, we have witnessed a gradual deterioration in the quality of education in government schools. It's a collective failure," the chief minister said. He urged school education department officials and all other stakeholders to work together to improve the sector in the state. *—PTI*

Actress Gautami Tadimalla joins AIADMK

CHENNAI, 14 FEB

Popular film actress Gautami Tadimalla on Wednesday called on All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) General Secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami and formally got inducted into the main opposition party in Tamil Nadu. The 55-year-old actress, who acted in over 120 films and was paired with top stars such as Rajinikanth and actor-politician Kamal Hassan, quit BJP in October 2023 after serving it for more than 25 years. On Wednesday, Gautami, who was born in Srikakulam, Andhra Pradesh, called on former chief minister Palaniswami at his residence in Chennai and formally joined the AIADMK, a press release said. The AIADMK chief handed over a copy of the book 'Maaperum Tamilkanavu (The Great Tamil Dream)' with an image of former Chief Minister C N Annadurai to Gautami on the occasion. *—PTI*

AAP leader Sanjay Singh moves SC against HC order

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

Aam Aadmi Party leader Sanjay Singh has moved the Supreme Court challenging the Delhi High Court order which refused to grant him bail in a money laundering case related to the Delhi excise policy 'scam'. The high court had on 7 February rejected the bail application of Singh, who has been re-elected to Rajya Sabha from Delhi, but directed the trial court to expedite the trial once begins. The plea challenging the high court order has been filed through advocates Vivek Jain and Rajat Bhardwaj. While delivering the verdict, the high court had said the issue of admissibility of the statement of approver, Dinesh Arora, cannot be tested at this stage of grant of bail and the same would be tested at the time of trial. *—PTI*

RS polls: BJP fields Nadda from Gujarat

Cong turncoat Ashok Chavan from Maharashtra

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

BJP on Wednesday fielded its President JP Nadda for Rajya Sabha polls from Gujarat and former Maharashtra chief minister Ashok Chavan from his home state.

Chavan joined BJP on Tuesday, a day after quitting the Congress. BJP's latest list of candidates for the biennial Rajya Sabha polls has seven nominees -- four for Gujarat and three for Maharashtra. Nadda is currently a Rajya Sabha member from Himachal Pradesh but BJP does not have the numbers to win the lone seat from the Congress-ruled state.

Seven BJP candidates filed their nomination papers here in presence of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath for the forthcoming Rajya Sabha elections. Those who filed the nomination papers included former Union Minister RPN Singh, former MP Chaudhary Tejveer Singh, state party general secretary Amarpal Maurya, former state minister

JP Nadda **PHOTO: PTI**

Ashok Chavan **PHOTO: PTI**

Sangeeta Balwant, party spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi, former MLA Sadhna Singh and former Agra mayor Naveen Jain.

While RPN belongs to Sainthwar-Kurmi, Chaudhary Tejveer Singh is a Jat, Maurya is Kori and Balwant is from Bind community. Trivedi, Sadhna Singh and Jain belong to Brahmin, Kshatriya and Jain communities respectively.

Tejveer said, "We will win the Lok Sabha polls hands down and get over 400 seats. I will strengthen the party and will follow whatever task I will be assigned by the party." Maurya said the party candidates are a vbouquet of "social equations". In the coming LS polls, the party will win all 80 seats in the state, he claimed. "In UP, Samajwadi Party will be finished and the state will be Congress-mukt (free)," he said. *—PTI*

Congress picks Ajay Maken and 5 others

The candidate are from K'taka, MP, T'gana

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

Congress on Wednesday announced its six candidates from Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Telangana for the Rajya Sabha elections to be held on 27 February.

The grand old party has fielded All India Congress Committee (AICC) treasurer Ajay Maken from Karnataka. Along with him, Rajya Sabha MP Syed Naseer Hussain and GC Chandrashekhar will also contest from the southern state.

Ashok Singh will contest from Madhya Pradesh, while former MP Renuka Chowdhury and Anil Kumar Yadav has been fielded from Telangana. Earlier today, Congress Parliamentary Party Chairperson Sonia Gandhi filed her nomination for the Rajya Sabha election from Rajasthan.

Party MP Rahul Gandhi, party's general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, former chief minister Ashok Gehlot and state party president Govind Singh Dotasra were also present.

CM Siddaramaiah and DyCM felicitated Rajya Sabha candidates to contest for Rajya Sabha elections from Karnataka in Bengaluru on Wednesday **PHOTO: SALAR**

The grand old party also announced its first list of candidates for the upcoming Rajya Sabha Biennial elections today. According to an official release from the All India Congress Committee, "Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge has approved the candidature of Sonia Gandhi from Rajasthan and Akhilesh Prasad Singh from Bihar."

Additionally, Abhishek Manu Singhvi has been fielded from Himachal Pradesh and Chandrakant Handore from Maharashtra. The term for Rajya Sabha MPs is six years, and elections are held after every two years for 33 per cent of the seats. Currently, the Rajya Sabha has a strength of 245 members. Voting will take place from 9 am to 4 pm on this date. *—ANI*

Commuters face hard time as restrictions intensify

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

To visit her gynaecologist in Delhi, over eight-month pregnant Madhu Kumari on Wednesday trudged wearily on foot trying to bypass the Singhu border made impregnable by the police using multi-layered barricades.

As a precaution, the streets and bylanes connecting Sonipat in Haryana to Delhi near the Singhu border were dug up to prevent the farmer protesters' 'Delhi Chalo' march from entering the national capital.

Madhu, 30, accompanied by her husband and two other relatives, was one of the large number of commoners forced to face hardships due to the sealed border and heavy deployment of police and para military personnel in the wake of the farmers' march. *—PTI*

People make their way through concrete barricades installed as part of security arrangements near Singhu border in view of farmers' 'Delhi Chalo' march on Wednesday **PHOTO: PTI**

Traffic unrestricted at Ghazipur border

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

Traffic movement remained unrestricted at the city's Ghazipur border with Uttar Pradesh on Wednesday while it was completely closed at the Singhu and Tikri borders with Haryana, on the second day of the farmers' Delhi Chalo march.The NH-9 and NH-24, which connect Delhi with Ghaziabad and Noida and further with Meerut, witnessed uninterrupted movement of vehicles during the day. According to police, traffic was heavy on both carriageways of the DND Flyway.

Multiple layers of barricades, concrete blocks, iron nails and container walls have been placed at the city's border points – Ghazipur, Singhu and Tikri – to thwart the farmers' march. *—PTI*

'Ensure right spirit for talk with farmers'

C'GARH, 14 FEB

Farmer leader Sarwan Singh Pandher on Wednesday said the tillers will consider any invitation for talks from the Centre over their demands but it should ensure a positive atmosphere for dialogue. Pandher also criticised the Centre for the police action against the protesting farmers, saying many cultivators have been injured. "But even then we don't say that we don't want to hold a dialogue but we urge the government to stop all this and ensure a positive atmosphere. We were ready for talks yesterday and we are ready for it eventoday," he said.*—PTI*

RaGa speaks with injured farmer, cancels yatra

NEW DELHI/RANCHI 14 FEB

Second phase of Rahul Gandhi's 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' in Jharkhand, which was scheduled to commence on Wednesday, has been cancelled, a party official said.

The cancellation took place as the senior Congress leader rushed to Delhi to take part in a farmers' agitation in New Delhi, party sources said.

Upon reaching the national capital, Gandhi spoke with a farmer injured in police action during the tillers' protest march, and accused the Modi government of having a "dictatorial attitude" towards the country's food providers.

Gandhi's telephonic conversation on Tuesday night with the injured farmer, Gurmeet Singh, was facilitated by Punjab Congress Chief Amarinder Raja Warring.

Farmers on Tuesday had clashed with the Haryana Police at two border points between the states, facing tear gas and water cannons as they tried to break past barricades blocking their protest march to the national capital. When the farmer spoke about the police action, Gandhi said, "it is completely wrong." *—PTI*

A KITKAT BREAK

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath feeds Kitkat to a child while visiting Azad Nagar during 'Gaon Chalo Abhiyan', in Gorakhpur on Wednesday **PHOTO: PTI**

WB BJP Chief injured after falling down on car bonnet

KOLKATA, 14 FEB

West Bengal BJP President Sukanta Majumdar was injured on Wednesday after losing balance and falling on a car's bonnet, on which he was standing, while addressing reporters in North 24 Parganas district, following which he was taken to a hospital, a party official said.

Majumdar, who was prevented from going to restive Sandeshkhali by the district administration on Tuesday, put up at a guest house in Taki late in the night following a dharna in front of the Basirhat police district SP's office. Majurmeder, who made attempts to go to Sandeshkhali again on Wednesday morning, was prevented by the police from leaving the area.

The incident happened at Taki on the banks of River Ichamati along the India-Bangladesh border.

He was taken to Basirhat sub-divisional hospital following the incident, he said. *—PTI*

T'gana CM slams KCR for his absence from Assembly

HYDERABAD, 14 FEB

Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy on Wednesday took exception to the comments of his predecessor and BRS President K Chandrasekhar Rao on the visit organised by the government to the damaged Medigadda barrage. He also criticised the leader of the opposition for not attending the ongoing assembly session and instead taking part in a BRS meeting at Nalgonda when the crucial issue of irrigation was being discussed in the house. Reddy, who spoke in the Telangana Legislative Assembly, objected to comments made by Rao at the Nalgonda public meeting on Tuesday in which he allegedly asked why the chief minister and others had visited the Medigadda barrage. Rao had launched a blistering attack on the Congress government, accusing it of "handing over" projects on the Krishna river to the centre-constituted Krishna River Management Board, as well as failing to ensure uninterrupted power supply to the state's farmers. *—PTI*

Sharad-led NCP will not merge with any political party: Sule

PUNE, 14 FEB

Sharad Pawar-led Nationalist Congress Party will not merge with any political party, its Lok Sabha member Supriya Sule asserted on Wednesday.

She was speaking to reporters after a meeting of the NCP at party Chief Sharad Pawar's residence here.

Apart from Pawar and Sule, former Maharashtra ministers Anil Deshmukh and Rajesh Tope, MPs Amol Kolhe and Shrinivas Patil along with others leaders attended the meeting.

"Our faction will not merge with any political party. We will contest the upcoming polls as part of the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA)," Sule said when asked about reports of her party's merger.

"Today's meeting was aimed at planning for an upcoming rally (of the INDIA bloc). The discussion revolved around the names of leaders who will

Sumalatha **PHOTO: SALAR**

address the rally," she said.

The party's Pune city unit president Prashant Jagtap said, "The news about the merger of our party is wrong. We will come forward with a new name and a new symbol."

Anil Deshmukh also denied reports that the NCP (Sharadchandra Pawar) will merge into any other political party.

The NCP was split in July last year after senior leader Ajit Pawar along with eight other MLAs joined the Eknath Shinde-led Maharashtra government. The Election Commission of India (ECI) last week allotted the party name 'NCP' and poll symbol 'clock' to the Ajit Pawar-led group. PTI

Eknath Shinde-led Sena nominates Milind Deora for RS polls

MUMBAI, 14 FEB

Shiv Sena led by Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde on Wednesday nominated former Congress leader Milind Deora as its candidatefor the coming Rajya Sabha election, sources said. Deora, a former Union minister, joined the Shiv Sena only last month. While he has been a two-time Lok Sabha member from Mumbai, this will be Deora's first election for Upper House. *—PTI*

LAL BAHADUR SHASTRI'S GRANDSON RESIGNS FROM CONG, JOINS BJP

NEW DELHI/ LUCKNOW, 14 FEB

Former prime minister Lal Bahadur Shastri's grandson Vibhakar Shastri on Wednesday joined BJP and announced leaving Congress.

Vibhakar joined BJP in Lucknow in the presence of party State President Bhupinder Singh and Deputy Chief Minister Brajesh Pathak. In a post on X, Shastri said, "Hon'ble Congress President Shri Kharge ji! Respected Sir, I hereby tender my resignation from the primary membership of Indian National Congress, Regards, Vibhakar."

Vibhakar Shastri.**PHOTO: PTI**

Vibhakar has unsuccessfully contested Lok Sabha polls in the past from Fatehpur Lok Sabha seat in Uttar Pradesh. Congress has witnessed a series of exits in the last few years where leaders are joining other parties. *—PTI*

IN WEST BENGAL

'Didi mute spectator to violence against women'

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

BJP on Wednesday charged that 'jungle raj' prevailed in West Bengal and demanded Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's resignation after the state was rocked by protests and clashes over the claims of sexual harassment of women in the state's Sandeshkhali area.

Addressing a press conference here, BJP national spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia claimed there is "complete anarchy and lawlessness" in West Bengal under the TMC rule with Banerjee allegedly providing protection to her party goons who allegedly raped and exploited tribal women in Sandeshkhali.

"There is jungle raj in West Bengal. Our sisters who belong to the scheduled tribes are being raped and assaulted by the TMC goons and Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is a mute spectator," he charged.

Bhatia said it is clear to every citizen that the rule of law doesn't exist in West Bengal. "Rather it is the law of anarchic ruler Mamata Banerjee which prevails there," he said. Asserting Banerjee has no right to remain in the post, BJP spokesperson said, "If she had even a little bit of shame left, she should immediately tender her resignation."

Mamata Banerjee **PHOTO: PTI**

- BJP national spokesperson Gaurav hatia said it is clear to every citizen that the rule of law doesn't exist in West Bengal. "Rather it is the law of anarchic ruler Mamata Banerjee which prevails there," he said

"If you do not resign, don't underestimate people. You will be uprooted, that is for sure," he added. Bhatia said the BJP will stand shoulder to shoulder with the victims of alleged sexual assault and take their fight for justice forward.

"This is every such woman's fight who has faith in the Constitution, no matter which party she voted for. BJP will take this fight with all might," he added. BJP leader alleged that the West Bengal government is giving "protection to rapists and weakening police" and said it won't be a surprise if it turns out that Sheikh, wanted by the Enforcement Directorate in connection with a money laundering case, is hiding at Banerjee's official residence in the state. *—PTI*

Modi pays homage to jawans killed in Pulwama attack

NEW DELHI, 15 FEB

Prime Minister NarendraModi on Wednesday paid tributes to the CRPF personnel killed in a terror attack in Pulwama on this day in 2019. He said on X, "I pay homage to the brave heroes who were martyred in Pulwama. Their service and sacrifice for our nation will always be remembered."Pakistan-linked terrorists had rammed an explosive-laden vehicle into a CRPF convoy on February 14, 2019, killing 40 personnel. In a retributive strike, the Indian Air Force had bombed suspected terrorist camps in Pakistan's Balakot. *—PTI*

7 arrested for assaulting 2 tribals in Madhya Pradesh

BETUL, 14 FEB

Two tribal men have been allegedly beaten up in separate incidents in Madhya Pradesh's Betul district following which the police have so far arrested seven prople, officials said on Wednesday.In one of the incidents which took place on 15 November last year, the victim, resident of Baspani area, was brought to Betul city by one of the accused, who was known to him, under some pretext following a dispute over the victim borrowing money from him.He was allegedly hung upside down in a room and beaten up with a belt, slippers and sticks, police said.The victim told reporters on Tuesday that he was afraid of the culprits due to their "criminal background" and hence did not report the matter earlier. In another incident, a tribal youth was allegedly beaten up by a mob here on 7 February over an old enmi-

Centre signs ₹1,752cr deal with Kanpur firm for remote guns

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

The Ministry of Defence on Wednesday signed a Rs 1,752.13-crore contract with a Kanpur-based firm for manufacturing and supply of 463 indigenously built 12.7 mm stabilised remote control guns for the Indian Navy and the Indian Coast Guard, officials said. This acquisition will provide further boost to the vision of "Aatmanirbharta in Defence", the ministry of defence said in a statement."This contract will also open up a large avenue in defence manufacturing for over 125 Indian vendors and Defence PSUs for over a period of five years," it added. The ministry signed the contract with Advanced Weapon Equipment India Limited (AWEIL), Kanpur for "manufacturing and supply of a total of 463 indigenously manufactured 12.7 mm stabilised remote control guns (SRCG) for the Indian Navy," it said. *—PTI*

Kerala passes urges Centre to amend wildlife laws

T'PURAM, 14 FEB

In the wake of increasing incidents of human-animal conflict in the state, the Kerala Assembly on Wednesday unanimously passed a resolution urging the Centre to amend wildlife protection laws to prevent such instances that have claimed many lives and resulted in major property and crop loss. The resolution to amend certain provisions of the Wildlife Protection Act and related rules, guidelines and advisories was moved in the house by Minister for Forests and Wild Life Protection A K Saseendran, while several modifications to it were suggested by opposition MLA's of the Congress-led UDF. Except the modification with regard to controlling the numbers of wild animals, other suggestions, such as urging the Centre to sanction Rs 50 lakh compensation to families were rejected by the minister. The minister said that the central laws, rules, guidelines protecting wildlife were stringent and hindered the control, regulation or killing of animals, such as wild boar, that come out of the forests and trouble the general public *—PTI*

Stalin moves resolutions against '1 Nation, 1 Election'

CHENNAI, 14 FEB

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin on Wednesday moved two resolutions in the Tamil Nadu Assembly, one that spoke against the 'One Nation, One Election' policy and the second against delimitation based on a fresh census.

'One Nation, One Election' is a proposal of the Indian government that aims to simultaneously conduct elections for the LokSabha and all state Assemblies. The proposal is currently under consideration of a committee led by former president Ram NathKovind.

While speaking in the State Assembly, he said, "The Legislative Assembly House urges the Union Government not to implement the 'One Nation, One Election Policy' as the theory of one nation, one election is against the basis of democracy, impractical and not enshrined in the Constitution of India."

After this resolution, he moved the second resolution against the proposed exercise of delimitation of constituencies based on a fresh census (The last census was conducted in 2011). Tamil Nadu fears that given its lower population size it will have limited representation in the LokSabha as compared to more populated states.

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin *PHOTO: ANI*

- Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin on Wednesday moved two resolutions in the Tamil Nadu Assembly, one that spoke against the 'One Nation, One Election' policy and the second against delimitation based on a fresh census.

Speaking on the floor of the House, he said, "We can't accept delimitation based on the census. States that are not interested in implementing population control policies will get more benefits because of delimitation based on the census."

"This House urges the Union government that the delimitation process to be carried out after 2026 based on the census should not be carried out. Due to unavoidable reasons, if the number of seats based on population were to increase, it would be maintained at the present ratio of the constituencies between the states in the state assemblies and both houses of parliament fixed based on the population of 1971," he said.

"So we urge that states like Tamil Nadu should not be penalised for implementing various socio-economic development programmes and welfare schemes for the benefit of the people over the past 50 years", he added.

"There are 39LokSabhaseats in Tamil Nadu, if delimitation is done, our number of LokSabhaseats will come down. Even with 39 MPs, our demands go unheard in the Parliament; if it's brought down, it may have a serious impact on our state," he added.

The move to pass the resolution comes as the high-level committee on 'One Nation, One Election' continues its engagements with state election com-

UAE & India ink 10 pacts on energy, economic corridor

The pacts were signed during Modi's meet with UAE President

ABU DHABI, 14 FEB

India and the UAE have inked 10 pacts for collaboration in key sectors like energy, infrastructure, investments, and management of archives, Foreign Secretary VinayKwatra said on Wednesday.

The 10 memoranda of understanding and agreements were signed during the meeting Prime Minister NarendraModi had with UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan on Tuesday.

He said the MoU in the field of electricity interconnection and trade will focus on green hydrogen and energy storage, besides cooperation on ensuring energy security and trade.

Kwatra said the Intergovernmental Framework Agreement concerning Cooperation for the Empowerment and Operation of the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) will further regional connectivity.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi with UAE Vice President, Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, at the World Government Summit, in Dubai, UAE, on Wednesday *PHOTO: PTI*

"The main areas under this agreement include cooperation on logistics platforms which is a crucial element of furthering the objectives of these particular corridors and provision of supply chain services to cover all types of general cargo, bulk containers, and liquid," he said.

The corridor was announced in New Delhi during the G20 summit in September.

The IMEC is being seen as an alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

The IMEC will connect India, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Israel and Europe.

He said the Bilateral Investment Treaty will set the basis for a stronger, wide-ranging investment partnership because it focuses, not just on protecting the existing investments, but also advances the objective of further capital flows between the two economies.

The MoU on the Development of the National Maritime Heritage Complex (NMHC) would foster engagement between the two countries aimed at supporting the Maritime Heritage Complex at Lothal, Gujarat.

He said the Cooperation Protocol between the National Library and Archives of the UAE and the National Archives of India will shape extensive bilateral cooperation in this field including restoration and preservation of archival material.

The protocol will promote cooperation in archives management through the exchange of expertise, historical information, research, and studies. *—ANI*

TEMPLE HAS ELEMENTS OF UAE

ABU DHABI, 14 FEB

Seven spires representing seven emirates of the UAE, carvings of camels, and national bird falcon, are part of the architecture of the first Hindu stone temple in Abu Dhabi, to give equal representation to the host country.

The temple built by the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha on a 27-acre site in Abu Mreikhah, near Al Rahba off the Dubai-Abu Dhabi Sheikh Zayed Highway, at a cost of around Rs 700 crore.

The land for the temple was donated by the UAE government.

"The seven spires have idols of deities, including Lord Ram, Lord Shiv, Lord Jagannath, Lord Krishna, Lord Swaminarayan (considered a reincarnation of Lord Krishna), TirupatiBalaji and Lord Ayappa," Swami Brahmaviharidas, head of international relations for BAPS, told PTI. *—PTI*

MODI TALKS AT WORLD GOVTS' SUMMIT

DUBAI, 14 FEB

Prime Minister NarendraModi said on Wednesday that the world needs governments that are inclusive and take everyone along. He noted that challenges of the previous century including food, health, water and energy security are increasing despite the progress in technology.

Addressing the World Governments Summit here, Modi said he believes that it is the job of the government to ensure that government interference in people's lives is minimal and he has been following the mantra of 'minimum government, maximum governance'. *—ANI*

MODI MEETS MADAGASCAR PREZ

Prime Minister NarendraModi on Wednesday held a bilateral meeting with Madagascar President Andry Rajoelina, in Abu Dhabi. Modi addressed the Indian diaspora at the AhlanModi' event held in Sheikh Zayed Sports Stadium in Abu Dhabi.'AhlanModi' roughly translates to 'Hello Modi'.Madagascar is a SAGAR partner of India. Launched in 2020, Mission SAGAR is a global initiative along the lines of the Sagar doctrine.India launched this mission to provide relief aid to Indian Ocean countries following the Covid-19 pandemic. This initiative covers the Maldives, Mauritius, Madagascar, Comoros, and Seychelles. India has had maritime links with Madagascar for several centuries. *—PTI*

TO APPROACH TRAIL COURT

Umar Khalid withdraws bail plea from SC

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

Umar Khalid *PHOTO:PTI*

Former JNU student Umar Khalid on Wednesday withdrew his bail plea from Supreme Court in a case lodged under anti-terror law UAPA over his alleged involvement in the conspiracy behind the northeast Delhi riots of February 2020.

A bench of Justices Bela M Trivedi and PankajMithal was told by senior advocate KapilSibal, appearing for Khalid, that he wishes to withdraw the bail plea due to "change in circumstances".

The bench accepted the request of Sibal and ordered for withdrawal of the bail plea of Khalid.

Khalid has challenged the 18 October, 2022 order of Delhi High Court by which his bail plea was rejected.

High Court had rejected Khalid's bail plea, saying he was in constant touch with other co-accused and the allegations against him were prima facie true.

High Court had also said the actions of the accused qualified as "terrorist act" under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act.

Khalid, Sharjeel Imam, and several others have been booked under the anti-terror law UAPA and several provisions of the Indian Penal Code for allegedly being the "masterminds" of the February 2020 riots, which left 53 people dead and over 700 injured.

The violence had erupted during the protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC).

Khalid, arrested by the Delhi Police in September 2020, had sought bail on grounds that he neither had any criminal role in the violence nor any "conspiratorial connect" with any other accused in the case.

The Delhi Police had opposed Khalid's bail plea in the high court, saying the speech delivered by him was "very calculated" and he brought up contentious issues like Babri Masjid, triple talaq, Kashmir, the alleged suppression of Muslims and the CAA and NRC. *—PTI*

Dalit groom assaulted for riding horse in wedding

The accused people said that only members of his community can ride a horse *PHOTO: REUTERS*

GANDHINAGAR, 14 FEB

Four people have been arrested for allegedly attacking a Dalit bridegroom for riding a horse as part of his wedding procession in Gujarat's Gandhinagar district, police said.

The incident took place on Monday afternoon in Chadasana village when the accused people also hurled casteist abuses at the Dalit groom, VikasChavda, while he was riding a horse as part of his wedding procession, a Mansa police station official said on Tuesday.

The groom, along with around 100 participants in the procession, was on way to the bride's house in the village when a man on a motorcycle intercepted and dragged him down from the horse and slapped him, said a complaint filed by the groom's cousin, Sanjay Chavda. The accused people said that only members of his community can ride a horse. Three more persons joined him and all the four started abusing and threatening the groom, the complainant stated in the FIR. *—PTI*

Women inmates in Bengal were pregnant when brought in, SC told

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

Sixty-two babies were born in West Bengal jails over the last four years and most of the women inmates who gave birth to them were expecting when brought to prison, Supreme Court has been informed.

The apex court had last week taken cognisance of the allegation about several women prisoners in West Bengal getting pregnant while in custody.

"In some cases, the women prisoners had gone out on parole and returned back expecting," senior advocate GauravAgrawal, who is assisting the court as an amicus curiae in a matter titled 'Inhuman conditions in 1,382 prisons', told the court.

Agrawal filed the application in a matter relating to alleged inhuman conditions prevailing in jails and sought the apex court's directions in light of reports which suggested quite a few women prisoners in West Bengal got pregnant while in custody.

He said in order to understand the security measures in jails or barracks for women, he held discussions with jail authorities of Rajasthan, Haryana and Delhi.

The application said it appeared from the conversations that in some places, including Delhi's Tihar jail, there are separate jails for women.

It said these jails have only women officials and no male staff are allowed to go inside.

He said the apex court had in its order on 30 January already directed constitution of a committee to examine some aspects regarding overcrowding in jails. *—PTI*

AFTER TUSKER ATTACK

Now, tiger & bison worry Wayanad

WAYNAD, 14 FEB

Days after a radio-collared wild elephant trampled a man to death here, alarming incidents of tiger, bison and elephant herds venturing into human settlements have been reported from Waynad.

The presence of a tiger was reported from a populated area of Padamala here on Tuesday. A CCTV visual of the big cat crossing a road in the area was released by local television channels. A frightened local woman, who says she almost had a close encounter with the animal in the morning, is yet to recover from the shock. "I heard a huge sound while I was standing in the backyard of my house. I thought it might be an elephant. But, a tiger passed in a flash of second...it moved so close...I do not know how I escaped," the shocked woman said.

Some people who went to a nearby church for morning prayers also reportedly saw the tiger *PHOTO: PTI*

She said they were already affected by the trauma of the death of Aji, a man who was trampled to death by a wild elephant in the district days ago.

Some people who went to a nearby church for morning prayers also reportedly saw the tiger.

In another incident, a man had a miraculous escape from a charging bison in Chithragiri-Neelimala road in the district on Monday. *—PTI*

'Man giving money to mom not domestic violence'

MUMBAI, 14 FEB

A sessions court here has dismissed a plea of a woman challenging a magistrate court order over her complaint against her husband and in-laws. The court observed that a man giving time and money to his mother cannot be considered as domestic violence.

Additional sessions judge (Dindoshi court) AshishAyachit on Tuesday said the allegations against the respondents are vague and ambiguous and there is nothing to prove that they subjected the applicant (woman) to domestic violence.

The woman, who works as an assistant in the 'Mantralaya' (state secretariat), had filed a complaint before a magistrate court under the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act for an order seeking protection, monetary relief and compensation.

She alleged that her husband got married to her by suppressing the mental illness of his mother and deceived her.

The woman also claimed her mother-in-law opposed her job and used to harass her and that her husband and his mother quarrelled with her. *—PTI*

SC COLLEGIUM ASKS 3 HIGH COURT JUDGES' TRANSFERS

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

Supreme Court collegium headed by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud has recommended to the Centre the transfer of three high court judges on their request.

In a meeting held on Tuesday, the collegium, also comprising Justices Sanjiv Khanna, BR Gavai, Surya Kant and Aniruddha Bose, accepted the request of Calcutta High Court judge Justice Moushumi Bhattacharya seeking a transfer to any other High Court. He has been transferred to Telangana High Court. *—PTI*

BASANT PANCHAMI

Around 42.9 lakh people took a dip in Ganga and Sangam on Wednesday on the occasion of Basant Panchami, the fourth bathing festival of Magh Mela in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh.The length of the ghats has been increased from 6,800 feet to 8,000 feet for the convenience of people. A total of 12 ghats have been built with adequate change facilities. Basant Panchami marks the preparation for the arrival of spring
PHOTO: PTI

Climate chaos, food crises threaten global peace: UN

According to Simon Stiell, the United Nations climate Chief, one in 10 people on the planet today already suffers from chronic hunger and if climate change accelerates, 'it will become worse'
PHOTO: PTI

United Nations (UN) Chief warned Tuesday that climate chaos and food crises are increasing threats to global peace, telling a high-level UN meeting that climate disasters imperil food production and "empty bellies fuel unrest."Secretary-General Antonio Guterres urged the UN Security Council to address the impact of food shortages and rising temperatures on international peace and security — a view echoed by many countries but not Russia.

"Climate and conflict are two leading drivers of (our) global food crisis," the secretary-general said. " Where wars rage, hunger reigns – whether due to displacement of people, destruction of agriculture, damage to infrastructure, or deliberate policies of denial."

Guterres said the world is teeming with examples of "the devastating relationship between hunger and conflict."

In war-torn Gaza, he said, no one has enough to eat and the tiny strip accounts for 80 per cent of the 700,000 hungriest people in the world. After more than a decade of war in Syria, he said, 13 million Syrians go to bed hungry every night. And in Myanmar, prospects of ending hunger have gone into reverse because of conflict and instability, he said.Simon Stiell, the United Nations climate Chief, told the council that climate change is contributing to food insecurity and to conflict.

He said one in 10 people on the planet today already suffers from chronic hunger and if climate change accelerates, "it will become worse."

"Rapid, sustained action to cut greenhouse gas emissions and to increase resilience is needed now to help stop both from spiraling out of control," Stiell said.Executive Secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change said the Security Council "must acknowledge more can be done rather than hoping the problem will go away — which it won't."

UN's most powerful body should be requesting regular updates on climate security risks, he said.Beth Bechdol, Deputy Director of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, said scientific evidence is clear: "Climate change is compromising food security, and its impacts are a growing threat to international peace and security."She reiterated a longtime FAO warning: "There is no food security without peace, and no peace without food security."

"While there may not be a direct causality between the two, there is clear evidence that climate change increases risks and drivers of conflict and instability, such as disputes over land and water," Bechdol said. "And conflict contributes to climate change vulnerability, especially for people who are forced to leave their homes and migrate."As an example of the complex relationship between climate change and conflict, she pointed to West and Central Africa herders who had peacefully crossed borders with their livestock in search of water and pasture for years. But climate change, environmental and security pressures have led to increased tensions and competition between herders and farmers for scarce resources including water and land, she said.Bechdol stressed that climate change and conflict affect not only livestock but crop production, fishing and forestry "which are intimately and inextricably linked to climate change."She urged the UN and others to focus on agriculture "as a key solution to the growing threats from climate change, conflict and their impacts on food security."

Guyana's President Mohamed Irfaan Ali, whose country holds the council presidency this month and chaired the meeting, said the impact of climate change and food insecurity on international peace and security was chosen as the topic for the meeting because of the increasing links. About 90 countries were expected to speak over two days.

"The Security Council must take into account the consequential effects on food security and climate in addressing the issues of conflict and war," he said, stressing that "these issues are intricately linked to the rule of law, democracy and governance."But Russia's UN Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia, whose country holds veto power in the Security Council, reiterated Moscow's longstanding position that there is no "direct link" between social and economic issues like climate and food supplies and the council's mandate to ensure international peace and security — and therefore these issues should be discussed in other specialized UN bodies.Instead, Nebenzia blamed former Western colonial powers and the United States as "the real root causes" of the problems facing developing countries in Africa and elsewhere today.

He said "they continue to siphon resources" from former colonies and take miliary action "against problematic sovereign countries to destroy their statehood" pointing to former Yugoslavia, Libya, Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria.
—AP

SALAR

Why is WHO promoting "healthy ageing"

By 2050, approximately a quarter of the UK population is expected to be over the age of 65. With this in mind, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has put "healthy ageing" on its agenda. This means finding ways to maintain health, wellbeing and functional ability in order to have a good quality of life and enjoy the later years.

Everyone ages at a different rate – but there are some things that can influence how well we age, such as by making changes to the types of activity we do and the foods we eat.

Older adults are generally less physically active than they were when they were younger and because of this, their energy intake requirement may decrease. However, there is a difference between energy requirements and nutrient requirements, and nutrient requirements actually remain the same, if not increase, as we get older.

This means we need to get more nutrients into less energy which can be tricky as older adults often have lower appetites. This is why scientists suggest that it may be necessary to enrich the food of older people to maintain the nutrient intake.

How to spot when someone isn't eating enough?

Several studies have shown that undernutrition affects one in ten older people living independently at home. However, it affects five in ten older people living in nursing homes, and seven in ten older people in hospital.

Being overweight, even obese, does not protect against undernutrition.

And when older adults lose weight, they lose muscle, meaning that they are more likely to lose their abilities to do daily tasks.

Weight loss in older adults is a key sign of malnutrition that needs to be addressed – but it can be easily missed, especially when many older adults associate the idea of thinness with good health. But clothing that's too loose or a watchstrap that floats on the wrist are all warning signs of undernourishment.

Similarly, if someone you care for has started to say things like, "Oh, I don't want much food today, I'm not hungry", "I'm not hungry, it's natural, I'm getting older", or "I'd rather just have a biscuit to be honest," then these could be warning signs. An effective way to keep on top of this is regular weighing at least once per month which enables a quick response to potential indicators of malnutrition.

Getting more nutrients into less food

If people are eating small amounts of food, it is important to think about how to add more nutrients into it. A very effective technique, "fortification" is commonly done with pre-made products such as breakfast cereals, plant-based milk and bread in the UK.

Fortification (adding foods, ingredients or nutrients into to existing foods or meals) is easy to do at home as well and can provide a flexible approach for older adults as it allows them to continue eating the foods that they most enjoy.

For older adults in particular, protein is a very important nutrient, because of muscle loss (sarcopenia) which is a natural part of ageing. This could be slowed down or even reversed by eating enough protein at regular intervals throughout the day. A few ways to increase protein include:

- Adding dairy ingredients such as milk, high-protein yoghurt, Quark (soft cheese), milk powders, eggs and cheese into meals – even into simple foods like mashed potato.
- Nuts are a great source of protein, try adding ground almonds to savoury or sweet meals (beware of nut allergies).
- Soy protein can be a convenient and cost-effective option, either for vegetarians or to further fortify minced-meat meals.
- Look in the sports section of supermarkets to find whey protein powders. These are marketed to gym enthusiasts, but actually whey is one of the best proteins to stimulate muscle growth. This versatile ingredient can be mixed into porridge before cooking or used it as a substitute for other powdered ingredients in baking.

Importance of physical activity and strength exercises

Physical activity and nutrition go hand-in-hand – both are equally important. As we age, being physically active becomes even more essential as it helps to prevent disease, maintains independence, decreases risk of falls, improves cognitive function, mental health and sleep.

Exercise can also combat isolation and loneliness which has also been linked to decreased appetite in older adults.

Often strength training gets ignored when we think of being active but to keep independence and prevent falls, older adults should do varied physical activity that emphasises balance and strength training at moderate or greater intensity on three or more days a week.

Ultimately, it's essential to contact a doctor or dietician with any worries or concerns about malnutrition or unintentional weight loss.

There are, however, some excellent resources to learn more about ageing healthily and maintaining a good quality of life in later years.

Courtesy, The Conversation

Studies have shown that undernutrition affects one in ten older people living independently at home,five in ten living in nursing homes, and seven in ten older people in hospital
PHOTO: FREEPIK

LETTERS

Write to us at salar@salar.news

Can airports cope with rapid passenger growth in the country?

India has become the world's largest aircraft purchaser after the US and China, with its fleet size set to grow from 713 to upwards of 2,000 over the next decade
PHOTO: PTI

The airline business is booming in the country, where the government has earmarked around USD 11 billion to build new airports and refurbish existing ones.

The goal is to have about 200 airports across India within five years, up from 150.

Rise in demand for air travel

India, with its 1.4 billion people, is home to the world's fastest-growing air passenger market and is poised to become the world's third-largest aviation market after China and the United States.

Country's domestic air passenger traffic is expected to double in the next six years, reaching 300 million by the end of 2030, according to the country's Civil Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia, who spoke at last month's Wings India summit in the southern city of Hyderabad.

Industry experts say that the capital, New Delhi, will be ready for 100 million passengers next year as it prepares to become the world's second busiest, behind Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport in the United States.

The Mumbai-to-New Delhi route is the world's third busiest.

"We are preparing for the potential by creating capacities, removing bottlenecks, simplifying procedures," said Scindia, "so that by 2047, when India achieves her 100th year of independence, this civil aviation sector is able to support not a current USD 4 trillion economy but a USD 20 trillion economy."

India has become the world's largest aircraft purchaser after the US and China, with its fleet size set to grow from 713 to upwards of 2,000 over the next decade.

In February 2023, Air India ordered 470 aircraft, including from Airbus and Boeing. The country's newest airline, Akasa, due to start international flights this year, is to announce an order for about 150 Boeing 737 MAX narrowbody planes.

Industry expert Kapil Kaul, who has been chronicling the buildup, said India is the aviation market of the 21st century that will certainly see continuous and long-term growth.

"Up to 2032, India has the airport infrastructure ahead of demand. The national capital region and Mumbai metropolitan have long-term infrastructure in place, but for the rest of the country, we need to plan for airport infrastructure beyond 2032," Kaul, CEO and director of the Australia-based CAPA Center for Aviation, said.

"The current capital expenditure for airport infrastructure is closer to USD 11 billion to support this growth. We have orders for 1,600 aircraft, and more is expected by the end of 2025."

However, Kaul pointed out that India must also significantly strengthen safety, security, skills, airspace architecture and institutional infrastructure to ensure this growth is well managed.

The industry is still dogged by minor problems, such as wintertime flight delays and cancellations when dense fog affects operations.Regulatory enforcement also needs strengthening.

Unlocking potential for Indian aviation

"Fog-inflicted problems in Delhi basically revolve around a lack of coordination and sometimes there are operational constraints as well as runway issues. But make no mistake that the aviation industry is in major growth mode," Jitender Bhargava, former executive director of Air India, said.

"These minor glitches happen across the world. Weather issues are not always under the control of airlines and airport authorities. When it happens in Europe, there is no backlash," Bhargava said. "However, potential growth in India is going to make it a very exciting market."

Two years ago, the Airports Authority of India, which manages much of the civil aviation infrastructure, said air traffic services need 40 per cent more staff to boost its current strength of 3,163 personnel.

Already the third-biggest domestic aviation market by volume, India is projected to be the third-largest overall by 2026, according to the International Air Transport Association (IATA), an industry body.

Analysts say the industry underwent a significant shift from 2013-14 onwards, marked by reforms such as removing price caps, fostering competitive dynamics and more affordable flying options.Around 250,000 people were directly employed in India's aviation and aeronautical manufacturing sector last year, according to data from the Civil Aviation Ministry.

This number is expected to grow to 350,000 by the end of this year.Arjun Subramaniam, a former air vice marshal with the Indian Air Force, said that as India expands its civil aviation ecosystem, better utilization of its airstrips for dual use would be ideal in the coming years.

"It will only add to the country's strategic heft, especially in smaller cities. What's more, there is also a need to upgrade civil aviation academies and flying schools so pilots can train here instead of going abroad."

—DW News

PHOTO: EPA

Bali to charge foreign tourists $10 entry tax

BALI, 14 FEB

Foreign tourists must now pay a 1,50,000 rupiah (£7.60; $9.60) levy to enter Bali, one of the world's most popular tourist destinations. Indonesian authorities say this is aimed at protecting the island's environment and culture. Bali is known for its pristine beaches and surfing waves, as well its beautiful landscapes. Official data shows that almost 4.8 million tourists visited Bali between January and November last year. The tourist tax, which was first announced last year, came into effect from Wednesday - Valentine's Day. It applies to foreign tourists entering the province from abroad or other parts of the country, with domestic Indonesian tourists exempt. Travellers are urged to pay up before arrival, through the Love Bali website. *—BBC News*

Uber and Lyft drivers plan Valentine's Day strike

WASHIGNTON, 14 FEB

Thousands of US ride-hailing workers plan to park their cars and picket at major US airports Wednesday in what organisers say is their largest strike yet in a drive for better pay and benefits. Uber and Lyft drivers plan day-long strikes in Chicago; Philadelphia; Pittsburgh; Miami; Orlando and Tampa, Florida; Hartford, Connecticut; Newark, New Jersey; Austin, Texas; and Providence, Rhode Island. Drivers also plan to hold midday demonstrations at airports in those cities, according to Justice for App Workers, the group organizing the effort. Rachel Gumpert, a spokesperson for Justice for App Workers, said ride-hailing drivers in other cities may also demonstrate or strike for at least part of the day. Uber said Tuesday it doesn't expect the strike to have much impact on its operations on Valentine's Day. *—AP*

PHOTO: AP

Illegal border crossings from Mexico plunge after Dec

WASHINGTON, 14 FEB

Arrests for illegal crossings on the US border with Mexico fell by half in January from record highs in December to the third lowest month of Joe Biden's presidency, authorities said on Tuesday. The sharp drop is welcome news for the White House, even if it proves temporary, as immigration becomes one of the biggest issues in this year's presidential election, with exit polls showing it is the top concern among many Republican voters in early primaries. House Republicans are waging a campaign to impeach US Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas for his oversight of the border. Seasonal declines and heightened enforcement by the US and its allies led to the sharp decline, said Troy Miller, acting commissioner of US Customs and Border Protection. US authorities have repeatedly praised Mexico for a crackdown launched in late December. Border Patrol arrests totalled 124,220 in January, down 50 per cent from 249,735 in December, the highest monthly tally on record. Arrests of Venezuelans plunged 91 per cent to 4,422 from 46,920 in December. Numbers ebb and flow, and the January decline may prove tenuous. Panama reported that 36,001 migrants traversed the notorious Darien Gap in January, up 46 per cent from December. Vast majority who cross the Panamanian jungle are Venezuelans headed to the US, with considerable numbers from Haiti, China, Ecuador and Colombia. "We continue to experience serious challenges along our border which surpass the capacity of the immigration system," Miller said. *—AP*

Bilawal Bhutto steps aside, paving way for Shehbaz Sharif's return

Bhutto said his experience with PML-N in the previous government was not good

ISLAMABAD, 14 FEB

Continued from Page 1

Based on the tally of Election Commission of Pakistan's (ECP), the total number of general seats won by the six parties-PML-N, PPP, MQM-P, PML-Q, IPP (Istehkam-e-Pakistan Party) and Balochistan Awami Party (BAP) which announced their plans to form a coalition comes to 152.

This clearly shows that these parties will easily achieve the minimum required number of 169 to form the government at the Centre after the addition of 60 women and 10 minority seats in their tally.

However, it is yet to be seen if these parties will be able to get to the next magic number of 224, which is required to obtain the elusive two-thirds majority in a 336-member National Assembly (NA).

"Now our war is against the country's challenges. The first challenge is the economy. We have to stabilise it which is a tall task. Nations move forward when their leadership unites and decides to end conflicts and take the nation forward to eliminate problems," he said.

PML-N reportedly enjoys the backing of the powerful Pakistan Army. Reacting to the latest political developments, jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party said that the best option for the PML-N is to "accept [its] defeat gracefully" and let their party founder Imran Khan "fix and heal the country".

Independent candidates backed by PTI won the most seats in Parliament. PTI Chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan said on Tuesday that his party had won 180 seats across the country, and the name of the party's prime ministerial candidate would be announced by Thursday.

During a conversation with the media, after meeting with the party's founding chairman and former premier Khan in Adiala Jail, along with other PTI leaders, he said that they had secured all three NA seats in Islamabad and an additional four seats in Balochistan.

Zardari speaking alongside Shehbaz said that a coalition government would be set up. "We have decided to form a coalition government and pull the country out of the economic crisis," he said and added that the new government would also try to reconcile with everyone including the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party of Imran Khan.

He promised to deliver the country out of these troubles and lead on to the road to prosperity. With the key parties getting together to form the new government, the transition from the election to the new government is likely to take place as per law by the end of this month.

PPP chairman Bilawal addressing a press conference after the meeting of its high-powered Central Executive Committee (CEC), which was held under his leadership, said his party failed to get a mandate to form a government in the federation.

He said PPP decided to form a committee to engage with other political parties for the formation of government and political stability. To a question, he said that his father and former president Asif Ali Zardari would be the candidate to become president as he was capable of getting the country out of the current problems.

To another question, he said that his experience with PML-N in the previous government was not good and his party leaders in the meeting raised concerns that their issues were not addressed by the PML-N during the tenure of the coalition government. *—PTI*

Based on the tally of ECP of all six parties PML-N, PPP, MQM-P, PML-Q, IPP and BAP clearly shows that these parties will easily achieve the minimum required number of 169 to form government **PHOTO:PTI**

Imran's party says its mandate has been stolen in the dark of the night

LAHORE/ISLAMABAD, 14 FEB

As major political parties in Pakistan backed the formation of a coalition government led by PML-N President Shehbaz Sharif, jailed former Prime Minister Imran Khan's party on Wednesday alleged that its mandate has been "stolen in the dark of the night". Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) on Tuesday night nominated Shehbaz, 72, as prime ministerial candidate instead of the party supremo and three-time former premier Nawaz Sharif. Khan-led Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's Central Information Secretary Raoof Hasan said that Imran's "mandate has been stolen in the dark of the night". In a post on X, Hasan said, "Pakistan is being put on [the] road to further destabilisation." Referring to a possible coalition government led by the PML-N, he said, "The decision to induct a bunch of criminals to form governments, who have been rejected by the people, reflects a myopic view of the grave challenges the country is beset with." Independent candidates backed by Khan's PTI sprang a surprise by winning the most seats in Parliament in the 8 February general elections. They have won 92 seats in the 266-member National Assembly. *—PTI*

US Defence Secy urges Senate to pass Nat'l security Bill 'immediately'

WASHINGTON, 14 FEB

US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin urged the Senate to pass the national security bill immediately to invest in America's national security, which will further bolster its deterrence in the Indo-Pacific.

He applauded the Senate's passage of the vital national-security supplemental, which will advance the US's core security interests and its bedrock values as the country continues to stand firm with its allies and partners around the world.

He emphasised that the bipartisan legislation will also provide military aid to Ukraine to defend itself from Russia's attacks, adding that it will also aid Israel against Hamas terror attacks. "This critical piece of bipartisan legislation will provide urgently needed military aid to help Ukraine defend itself against Putin's flagrant aggression; it will deliver additional security assistance to Israel after the 7 October Hamas terrorist assault, along with humanitarian aid for innocent Palestinian civilians in Gaza; and it will bolster our deterrence in the Indo-Pacific," he said.

"The world is watching, and lives are on the line. I urge the House to pass this bipartisan bill immediately to invest in America's national security," Austin said. *—ANI*

An electoral worker shows a ballot paper during the vote counting at a Valentine's Day-themed polling station in Solo **PHOTO: AP**

Voting begins in Indonesia to elect new President

JAKARTA, 14 FEB

Voting started in Indonesia on Wednesday with more than 200 million voters casting their ballots to elect a new President amid concerns regarding the cost of living and human rights, CNN reported.

Indonesia aims to enter a new phase in politics after President Joko Widodo has completed his maximum term as president.

The people of Indonesia will elect not only a new president and vice president but also parliamentary and local representatives in the world's largest single-day election, reported Al Jazeera.

More than 204 million of Indonesia's 270 million people are registered to vote, and while voting is not compulsory, election day is a public holiday so turnout is generally high.

The voter turnout during the last election in 2019 was 81 per cent, according to Indonesia's General Election Commission.

There are 18 national political parties across Indonesia, with 575 parliamentary seats up for grabs. The incumbent Indonesian president, Joko Widodo, popularly known as 'Jokowi', has completed the maximum two terms in office, so this year's election will mark the first change in leadership in 10 years.

Even Sembiring, the director of the Indonesian Forum for Environment in Riau (WALHI Riau) described the election as an "opportunity for healing" for Indonesian voters and "an important moment of potential to restore Indonesia for the next five years". Three presidential and vice presidential pairings are vying for the top jobs including a former military general, a one-time academic and a self-professed "man of the people." *—ANI*

UN warns attack on Rafah could lead to 'slaughter'

UNITED NATION, 14 FEB

A top UN official has warned an Israeli assault on Rafah, Gaza's southernmost city, could lead to a "slaughter".

Humanitarian chief Martin Griffiths said Palestinians in Gaza were already suffering an "assault that is unparalleled Vin its intensity, brutality and scope". The consequences of an invasion of Rafah would be "catastrophic", he said.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to defeat Hamas gunmen he says are hiding in the city. In an unusually strongly worded statement, Griffiths said over a million people were "crammed in Rafah, staring death in the face". He said civilians in the city had little food or access to medicine and "nowhere safe to go".

An Israeli invasion of the city, he added, would "leave an already fragile humanitarian operation at death's door". A spokesperson for UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres told BBC's Newshour programme the UN had not received any Rafah evacuation plans from Israel and would not participate in any forced evacuation. Stephane Dujarric said: "The United Nations will not be party to any forced displacement of people."

Rafah is a small city in the south of the Gaza Strip on the border with Egypt. Before the war it was home to around 2,50,000 people, but since Israel ordered civilians to evacuate south its population has swelled to an estimated 1.5 million.

Many are living in tents in desperate conditions and say they have nowhere to go. Rafah has come under heavy Israeli air strikes in recent days, with at least 67 people killed there on Monday according to the Hamas-run health ministry. *—BBC News*

Humanitarian chief Martin Griffiths civilians in the city had little food or access to medicine **PHOTO: AP**

Ukraine claims sinking Russian ship off Crimea

KYIV, 14 FEB

A big Russian amphibious ship, the Caesar Kunikov, has sunk off the coast of Russian-occupied Crimea, according to Ukraine's armed forces.

Powerful explosions were heard early on Wednesday morning, according to local social media, which suggested the landing ship had been hit not far south of the town of Yalta. Ukraine has repeatedly hit Russia's Black Sea fleet in occupied Crimea.

Satellite images last year showed much of the fleet had left the peninsula. Ukraine's Main Directorate of Intelligence published a video of what it said were Magura V5 naval drones striking the landing ship. Russia's full-scale war in Ukraine is due to enter its third year next week and Ukraine's armed forces chief has admitted the situation is "extremely complex".

Col Gen Oleksandr Syrskyi, who was appointed commander-in-chief last week, visited the front line on Wednesday hours after a Russian missile attack claimed three lives in the eastern town of Selydove.

There was no confirmation from Russia's navy that the Caesar Kunikov had been sunk in the Black Sea, merely that six Ukrainian drones had been destroyed. Video appearing to show the aftermath of the Ukrainian attack was uploaded only recently, BBC Verify confirmed.

"The Caesar Kunikov suffered critical holes in its port side and began to sink," Ukraine's intelligence directorate said adding that it had been destroyed in Ukrainian territorial waters by a unit called Group 13. *—BBC News*

SOUTH KOREA ACCUSES NORTH KOREA OF FIRING CRUISE MISSILES

SEOUL, 14 FEB

North Korea on Wednesday fired multiple cruise missiles into the sea in its fifth test of such weapons since January, South Korea's military said, extending a streak in weapons demonstrations that are elevating tensions in the region. South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said the South Korean and US militaries were analysing the launches that were detected in waters northeast of the eastern coastal city of Wonsan. South Koreana army didn't immediately provide the exact numbers of missiles fired or how far they flew. It wasn't immediately clear either whether the missiles were fired from.

"Our military has increased surveillance and vigilance and is working closely with our US partners," Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement. *—AP*

Biden blasts Trump for 'shocking' Nato remarks

WASHINGTON, 14 FEB

US President Joe Biden has blasted criticism of Nato by his likely 2024 election challenger, Donald Trump, as "dumb", "shameful" and "un-American".

The Democrat assailed Mr Trump for saying he would "encourage" Russia to attack any Nato member that did not meet its defence spending quota. Biden said the remarks underscored the urgency of passing a $95bn (£75bn) foreign aid package for US allies.

The bill just passed the Senate, but it faces political headwinds in the House.

At the White House on Tuesday, Biden said a failure to pass the package - which includes $60bn for Ukraine - would be "playing into Putin's hands".

He said the stakes have risen because of Trump's "dangerous" remarks over the weekend.

"No other president in history has ever bowed down to a Russian dictator," Biden said.

"Let me say this as clearly as I can. I never will. For God's sake. It's dumb. It's shameful. It's dangerous. It's un-American." *—BBC News*

Joe Biden **PHOTO: PTI**

Democrats win race to replace George Santos

A Democrat has won the swing US congressional district left vacant when former Republican Congressman George Santos was expelled last December. Tom Suozzi's Tuesday night victory over rival Mazi Pilip denies Republicans a chance to pad out their slim majority in the House of Representatives. He will finish Santos's term following his removal from Congress over allegations of fraud. The race was a closely watched bellwether for the November elections. In a victory speech briefly interrupted by protesters calling for a ceasefire in Gaza, Suozzi said, "This race was fought amidst a closely divided electorate." *—BBC News*

Indian-American family found dead in their US home

NEW YORK, 14 FEB

An Indian-origin family, including their 4-year-old twin boys, has been found dead at their home in California with the police investigating the case as a murder-suicide, in the latest in a string of tragedies to strike the community in the US.

The victims have been identified by the friends as Anand Sujith Henry, his wife Alice Priyanka, and their 4-year-old twin boys, NBC Bay Area reported. However, the victims' identities have not yet been released, police said.

The incident took place in San Mateo on Monday, police were quoted as saying by the report. On Monday, Police said a 911 call spurred a welfare check at the location after someone reported they hadn't heard from the residents for some time. They arrived and checked the exits of the home and found no signs of forced entry.

"Unfortunately, we located four deceased people inside the home. One adult male. One adult female and two children," said Jerami Surratt, public information officer with the San Mateo Police Department.

According to court records, the husband filed for divorce in December 2016 but apparently did not go through with it. *—PTI*

KILLED MILLIONS IN MEDIEVAL EUROPE

Bubonic plague case reported in Oregon

OREGON, 14 FEB

A case of bubonic plague – the disease that killed tens of millions of people in medieval Europe – was reported in rural Oregon last week.

The afflicted individual was promptly treated, and health officials believe that there is "little risk to the community" that the disease will spread.

Though the disease, which officials believe was likely passed on to the individual from a sick pet cat, is exceedingly rare in the modern day, a few cases are reported each year.

But in 2024, doctors know much better how to treat the disease and prevent its spread.

What is the plague?

The bubonic plague is an infectious disease that can affect mammals, caused by the Yersinia pestis bacteria. It is often transmitted via fleas infected with the bacteria. It can also be caught by inhaling respiratory droplets after close contact with animals or humans sick with pneumonic plague, the most severe form of the disease.

Plague symptoms can manifest in a few ways. Bubonic plague – the kind contracted by the Oregon resident – happens when the plague bacteria gets into the lymph nodes. It can cause fever, headache, weakness and painful, swollen lymph nodes. It usually happens from the bite of an infected flea, according to the CDC.

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

Who is at risk?

In the US, an average of seven cases of human plague are reported each year, according to the CDC, and about 80% of them are the bubonic form of the disease. Most of those cases are reported in the rural western and south-western US.

A welder in central Oregon contracted bubonic plague in 2012 when he pulled a rodent out of his choking cat's mouth – he survived but lost his fingertips and toes to the disease.

Isn't plague from the Middle Ages?

The black death in the 14th century was perhaps the most infamous plague epidemic, killing up to half the population as it spread through Europe, the Middle East and northern Africa. It began devastating communities in the Middle East and Europe between 1347 and 1351, and significant outbreaks continued for roughly the next 400 years. *—Courtesy, The Guardian*

Rupee rises 5 paise to close at 83.03 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 14 FEB

The rupee appreciated 5 paise to close at 83.03 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday, tracking positive domestic equities. Forex traders said strength of the American currency in the overseas market and elevated crude oil prices weighed on the local unit and restricted a sharp uptick.At the interbank foreign exchange, the local unit opened at 83.11 against the greenback. It hit an intraday high of 83.02 and a low of 83.12.It finally settled at 83.03 (provisional) against the dollar, higher by 5 paise from its previous close of 83.08."We expect the rupee to trade with a slight negative bias on strong US dollar and risk aversion in global markets. Rising crude oil prices may also put pressure on the rupee," said Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas. *—PTI*

Gold tumbles ₹750; silver nosedives ₹ 1,400

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

Gold prices tumbled Rs 750 to Rs 62,350 per 10 grams in the national capital on Wednesday amid weak global cues, according to HDFC Securities.In the previous trade, the precious metal had ended at Rs 63,100 per 10 grams.Silver also nosedived Rs 1,400 to Rs 74,000 per kg, while it had closed at Rs 75,400 per kg in the previous close."Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at Rs 62,350 per 10 grams, down by Rs 750 taking bearish cues from overseas markets," Saumil Gandhi, senior analyst of commodities at HDFC Securities, said. *—PTI*

Travel portal ixigo's parent firm files for IPO

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

Le Travenues Technology Ltd, which operates travel booking platform ixigo, on Wednesday filed preliminary papers with Sebi to raise funds through an initial public offering.The Gurugram-based company's Initial Public Offering (IPO) will be a combination of fresh issue of equity shares worth Rs 120 crore and an Offer For Sale (OFS) of 6.66 crore equity shares by existing shareholders, according to the Draft Red Herring Prospectus (DRHP).SAIF Partners India IV Ltd, Peak XV Partners Investments V (formerly known as SCI Investments V), Micromax Informatics Ltd, Placid Holdings, Catalyst Trusteeship Ltd, Madison India Capital HC, Aloke Bajpai and Rajnish Kumar will be selling shares through the OFS.Proceeds worth Rs 45 crore will be used to fund working capital requirements and Rs 26 crore will be utilised for investments in technology as well as data science, including on cloud and server hosting, technology on artificial intelligence and customer engagement.*—PTI*

Tata Power and Communications tie up for solar project

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

Tata Power Renewable Energy Ltd (TPREL) has signed an agreement worth Rs 105 crore with Tata Communications to set up a 18.75 MW captive solar plant in Maharashtra.TPREL has signed a power delivery agreement with Tata Communications for a 18.75 MW group captive solar power plant, it said."We partner with Tata Communications to support their transition to renewable energy and duly enable their progress in the digital ecosystem arena for being a market leader in Commtech space. Our customised green energy solutions such as group captive solar will not only reduce operating costs but also increase energy efficiency," TPREL CEO and MD Deepesh Nanda said.TPREL, an arm of Tata Power, has achieved a milestone by surpassing a capacity of over 1.5 gigawatts (GW).Power Purchase Agreements span a diverse range of industries, including steel, iron casting, manufacturing, hospitality, automotive, among others. *—PTI*

0.27% IN JANUARY

The inflation was in the negative zone from April to October and had turned positive in November at 0.39% ***PHOTO: PTI***

Wholesale inflation eases to 3-month low

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

The wholesale price index (WPI)-based inflation eased to a three-month low of 0.27 per cent in January, mainly due to moderation of food prices, including vegetables.The WPI inflation was in the negative zone from April to October and had turned positive in November at 0.39 per cent.In January 2023, it was at 4.8 per cent and in December 2023 it was 0.73 per cent.

"The annual rate of inflation based on the All India Wholesale Price Index (WPI) number is 0.27 per cent (provisional) for the month of January, 2024 (over January, 2023)," the commerce and industry ministry said in a statement on Wednesday.

The previous low level of WPI inflation was recorded in October 2023, when it was (-) 0.26 per cent.In January, food inflation declined to 6.85 per cent, from 9.38 per cent in December 2023.

Within food articles, inflation in vegetables eased to 19.71 per cent from 26.3 per cent in December. Inflation in potatoes was in the negative zone.

The prices of fruits, eggs, milk, fish, and milk have eased.

In the fuel and power segment, inflation was (-) 0.51 per cent in January, as against (-) 2.41 per cent in December 2023.

In manufactured products, inflation was (-) 1.13 per cent, as against (-) 0.71 per cent in the previous month.

The Reserve Bank in its bi-monthly monetary policy earlier month held interest rates steady with a view to bring down Consumer Price Index (CPI) or retail inflation at 4 per cent. Retail inflation still rules over 5 per cent. *—PTI*

SIDBI invests ₹100cr for Nagaland projects

KOHIMA, 14 FEB

SIDBI has entered into an agreement with the Nagaland government, committing over Rs 100 crore for entrepreneurship projects in the north-eastern state.

Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) is the apex regulatory body for overall licensing and regulation of micro, small and medium enterprise finance companies in India. It is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Finance.

SIBDI Chief General Manager Subhransu S Acharya, during an event on Tuesday night, said it would fund four projects, including setting up of industrial infrastructure for MSMEs under cluster development fund and Swavalamban Connect Kendras (SCK) for all the 16 districts to boost the spirit of entrepreneurship.

SIDBI also announced sports scholarships of Rs 5 lakh each for the training of five promising sportspersons.

It would also provide seed funds to support the entrepreneurs in their startup journey.

Nagaland Advisor for Industry and Commerce Hekani Jakhalu Kense and SIDBI Chairman and Managing Director S Ramann were present on the occasion.

Kense said, "Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio has been very clear in stating that if the state's economy has to grow, local entrepreneurs have to grow first." *—PTI*

Markets extend gains on fag-end buying

Nifty gains 96.80 pts or 0.45% to end the day at 21,840.05 pts

MUMBAI, 14 FEB

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty bounced back from early lows to close higher on Wednesday, helped by fag-end buying in energy, metal and utility stocks amid a mixed trend in global equities.

Rising for the second straight session, the 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 267.64 points or 0.37 per cent to close at 71,822.83 points. The index swung between a high of 71,938.59 points and a low of 70,809.84 points during intra-day trades.

The broader NSE Nifty also gained 96.80 points or 0.45 per cent to end the day at 21,840.05 points.

State Bank of India was the biggest gainer in the Sensex pack, rising 4.24 per cent, followed by Tata Steel, Axis Bank, Maruti, NTPC, PowerGrid, ITC and Nestle India. Reliance jumped 1.15 per cent to end at Rs 2,962.60 apiece on BSE.

Shares of SBI closed at Rs 743.35 apiece.

In contrast, Tech Mahindra, Sun Pharma, TCS, Infosys and HDFC Bank were among the laggards.

In Asia, Japan's Nikkei 225 settled in the negative territory while Hong Kong's Hang Seng and South Korea's Kospi indices ended in the green.

China's financial markets are closed for the Lunar New Year holidays.

European markets were trading on a positive note in early deals.

The US market ended with significant losses in the overnight trade on Tuesday.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude rose 0.78 per cent to USD 82.64 a barrel on Tuesday.

- In contrast, Tech Mahindra, Sun Pharma, TCS, Infosys and HDFC Bank were among the laggards

In the previous session, Sensex surged 482.70 points or 0.68 per cent to settle at 71,555.19 points. Nifty climbed 127.20 points or 0.59 per cent to close at 21,743.25 points.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net buyers in the capital markets on Tuesday as they purchased shares worth Rs 376.32 crore, according to exchange data. *—PTI*

ADANI GREEN GENERATES POWER AT KHAVDA

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

Adani Green Energy Ltd (AGEL) on Wednesday announced commissioning of 551 MW solar capacity at Khavda renewable energy park in Gujarat.

The company plans to develop 30 GW of renewable energy capacity at this RE park, which is expected to be operational in the next five years.

When completed, the Khavda RE park will be the largest renewable energy installation in the world, the company said in a statement.

"Adani Green Energy is creating one of the world's most extensive renewable energy ecosystems for solar and wind," said Gautam Adani, Chairman, Adani Group.

Through bold and innovative projects like the Khavda RE plant, AGEL continues to set higher global benchmarks and rewrite the world's planning and execution standards for giga-scale renewable energy projects, he said.

AGEL has an operating renewable portfolio of over 9 GW, the largest in India, spread across 12 states, the statement said.

AGEL said it commissioned the 551 MW solar capacity within 12 months of commencing work on the RE park, starting with the development of basic infrastructure, including roads and connectivity, and creating a self-sustaining social ecosystem. *—PTI*

1st green hydrogen plant at Cochin airport

KOCHI, 14 FEB

In a strategic move to bolster its pathbreaking green energy initiatives, Cochin International Airport Ltd (CIAL) has entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) for setting up a green hydrogen plant in the premises of Cochin Airport. This collaborative effort will result in the world's first green hydrogen plant and fueling station located within an airport setting, CIAL said in a statement on Wednesday.

Green hydrogen, produced from water using renewable energy sources, is recognized as a future fuel and aligns with zero-carbon energy strategies, it said. The agreement exchange ceremony for the green hydrogen plant was held at Legislative Complex, Thiruvananthapuram in the presence of Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan who is also the chairman of CIAL, the statement said.

"As pioneers in sustainable aviation, CIAL is happy to start a groundbreaking journey with BPCL towards establishing the country's first green hydrogen plant in an airport," CIAL Managing Director, S Suhas IAS is quoted as having said in the statement. He also said that this strategic collaboration underscores CIAL's commitment to green energy and propels closer towards a zero-carbon future in the aviation landscape. *—PTI*

The collaboration underscores CIAL's commitment to green energy and propels closer towards a zero-carbon future ***PHOTO: PTI***

Firefox maker Mozilla to sack 60 employees as tech layoffs continue

CALIFORNIA, 14 FEB

Mozilla said that the move affects about 5 per cent of its workforce and that the layoffs were primarily in the product development organization

Mozilla Corp., the maker of web browser Firefox, is cutting about 60 jobs as part of a shake-up under a new chief executive officer.

Mozilla said that the move affects about 5% of its workforce and that the cuts were primarily in the product development organisation. The company informed employees of the decision on Tuesday.

Mozilla last cut a significant number of jobs four years ago at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

The move comes a week after the company named Laura Chambers as its CEO. She's a former Airbnb Inc. and eBay Inc. executive who joined Mozilla's board three years ago. Mitchell Baker, Mozilla's long-time chief, stepped down to become the company's executive chairman.

Mozilla last cut a significant number of jobs four years ago at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic. *—Bloomberg*

FPI INVESTMENT VALUE RISES 13% IN DEC QUARTER

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

The value of FPIs (Foreign Portfolio Investors) holding in Indian equities reached USD 738 billion in the three months ended December 2023, marking a surge of 13 per cent from the preceding quarter, driven by the strong performance of the domestic stock market, according to a report by Morningstar. The value of FPIs investment was at USD 651 billion in the September quarter of the current fiscal. On a year-on-year basis, the value of such investments rose 26 per cent from USD 584 billion in December 2022. *—PTI*

Sales of luxury homes up 75% in 7 cities

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

High Net-worth Individuals (HNIs) are showing keen interest in buying luxury residential properties as sales of homes costing Rs 4 crore and above rose 75 per cent last year across seven major cities, according to real estate consultant CBRE. Delhi-NCR saw a nearly three-fold jump in sales of luxury homes last year. It also recorded the highest sales among seven major cities.

CBRE on Wednesday released a report, showing a 75 per cent increase in sales of luxury homes (each priced Rs 4 crore and above) to 12,935 units in 2023 calendar year from 7,395 units in the previous year. Anshuman Magazine, Chairman & CEO - India, South-East Asia, Middle East & Africa, While regional dynamics might lead to fluctuations in capital values, he said the overall outlook remains positive. According to the data, the sales of luxury homes in Delhi-NCR jumped to 5,530 units in 2023 from 1,860 units in the previous year.

In Mumbai, sales of luxury homes in Rs 4 crore and above price category rose to 4,190 units from 3,390 units.

Sales of luxury residential properties in Hyderabad rose to 2,030 units from 1,240 units.

Pune witnessed sales of 450 units last year as against 190 units in 2022.

Sales of luxury homes in Bengaluru remained flat at 265 units last year. Kolkata saw a marginal increase in sales of luxury homes to 310 units from 300 units.

In Chennai too, sales rose marginally to 160 units last year from 150 units in 2022.

As per the CBRE data, the overall housing sales across price categories exceeded 3,22,000 units in 2023, registering a 9 per cent year-on-year growth. *—PTI*

Jeff Bezos sells Amazon shares worth $4B, 2nd time this month

SEATLLE, 14 FEB

Multi-billionaire Jeff Bezos has sold more of his shares in Amazon, bringing the total value of sales in recent days to more than USD4 billion.

The technology giant, which Bezos founded in 1994, said he has sold 24 million Amazon shares this month.

Bezos, who is the firm's Executive Chair, last sold Amazon shares in 2021.

Earlier this month, the company said he was planning to sell 50 million shares over the next year, which are worth around $8.4bn. The first sale of 12 million shares was announced in a regulatory filing on Friday.

Jeff Bezos ***PHOTO: PTI***

Bezos has also given away shares in Amazon as part of his philanthropy.

As Bezos moved to Miami in Florida from Seattle in Washington last year, he will save around $280m in tax on the USD 4 billion worth of stock he has sold.

Gains above $250,000 from the sale of shares or other long-term investments, are taxed at 7 per cent in Washington state.

Florida does not have state taxes on incomes or capital gains.

However, he will still be liable to federal taxes as a result of selling the shares.

His sales of Amazon shares come after they have risen by almost 70 per cent in the past year. Mr Bezos remains Amazon's biggest shareholder and is one of the richest people in the world, with an estimated fortune of more than USD 190 billion. *—BBC News*

BHEL bags 800 MW project in Haryana

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

State-owned BHEL on Wednesday said it has bagged an order to set up an 800 MW ultra-supercritical thermal power plant at Yamunanagar in Haryana. 800 MW Deenbandhu Chhotu Ram Thermal Power Plant (DCRTPP) will be Haryana's first ultra-supercritical technology-based power project, Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (BHEL) said in a statement."Under International Competitive Bidding (ICB), BHEL has won an order for setting up an 800 MW Ultra-supercritical thermal power plant on engineering, procurement and construction (EPC) basis, at Yamunanagar, Haryana, from HPGCL (Haryana Power Generation Corporation Ltd.)," the company said. BHEL said it has executed central and state thermal utility projects of over 3,000 MW *—PTI*

YOY GROWTH OF 14%

Two-wheeler sales rose by 26% in January

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

Two-wheeler sales in India rose 26 per cent to 1.49 million units in January 2024 as against 1.18 million units sold in the same month of last year, according to data put out by the Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers released on Wednesday.According to SIAM, passenger vehicle sales were 393,074 units in January 2024 as against 346,080 units sold in January 2023, registering a year-on-year growth of 14 per cent. Three-wheeler sales were 53,537 units in January 2024 as against 48,903 units sold in the same month of the previous year."Passenger vehicle sales have remained resilient led by positive consumer sentiments, while the Two-Wheeler Segment witnessed good growth in January as well, as the rural market continues to recover. Three-Wheeler segment has also performed better," said Vinod Aggarwal, President, of SIAM.Though the commercial vehicle sector did not grow in January 2024, it is likely to see good offtake in the next 2 months of this financial year 2023-24, said Aggarwal.

Passenger vehicle sales were 393,074 units in January 2024 as against 346,080 units sold in January 2023 ***PHOTO: PTI***

"Government's strategic focus on mobility in Budget 2024, including strengthening the electric vehicle ecosystem, especially the charging infra and public transport, should help in continuing with the overall growth momentum for the Auto Sector," he added.

"Passenger Vehicles and Three-Wheelers continue to post their highest ever sales till date, in FY24, for the period April to January," Menon said. *—ANI*

PHOTO: PTI

India stun China 3-2, Sindhu making a winning return

SHAH ALAM, 14 FEB

Two-time Olympic medallist P V Sindhu made a winning return from a lengthy injury lay-off as India stunned formidable China 3-2 in the women's competition of the Badminton Asia Team Championships here on Wednesday.With just two teams in Group W, India was assured of a knock-out round berth even before their opening match but the team made its mark in style with the shock win over the top-seeded Chinese team.Sindhu, who was missing in action since October last year due to a knee injury at the French Open, led the way as she beat higher-ranked Han Yue 21-17 21-15 in 40 minutes to give India a 1-0 lead in the tie.—*AP*

PHOTO: ANI

Nabi ends Shakib's long reign as top ODI all-rounder

DUBAI, 14 FEB

Afghanistan all-rounder Mohammed Nabi on Wednesday became the oldest player to headline the ICC ODI all-rounders' list, ending Shakib Al Hasan's long reign at the top. There is little to no change at the top of the Test rankings with India's Jasprit Bumrah firmly perched at the top of the bowlers' list. India's Ravindra Jadeja, who is set to return in the third Test against England beginning Thursday, still led the way comprehensively in Test all-rounders' rankings. Nabi reached the No.1 spot following his 136 during the opening match of Afghanistan's three-match ODI series against Sri Lanka.—*AP*

PHOTO: PTI

Rehan's visa issue is sorted, great job by BCCI: Stokes

RAJKOT, 14 FEB

England skipper Ben Stokes on Wednesday expressed relief after young leg-spinner Rehan Ahmed's visa issue was sorted in quick time due to the intervention of the Indian government and the BCCI. Ahmed, the spinner of Pakistani descent, had a single-entry visa upon arrival in Rajkot but he was able to complete his paperwork a day before the start of the third Test against India."For any individual having to wait for that is always an anxious period, but thankfully, we got it through this morning, and great job from the guys at the airport for giving him his visa to get through initially.—*AP*

Prasad stretches lead to three shots in round two

KOLKATA, 14 FEB

Delhi's Arjun Prasad kept up the intensity with a five-under 65 in round two to stretch his lead to three shots at a total of 13-under 127 at the Rs 1 crore TATA Steel PGTI Players Championship here on Wednesday.Rahil Gangjee (65), rookie Stepan Danek (66) of the Czech Republic, and defending champion Sachin Baisoya (67), were tied in second place at 10-under 130.The cut was applied at two-under 138. Fifty-six professionals cut.Arjun Prasad (62-65) battled it out on the back nine with a birdie and a bogey each as the conditions were not as suitable for scoring.—*AP*

India seeks quick middle-order solutions against England

Mark Wood replaces Shoaib Bashir as England name playing XI

RAJKOT, 14 FEB

India will need to be ruthless and tactful in equal measure while dealing with an unpredictable England when the third chapter of a riveting Test series begins here on Thursday.

After England shocked India in the series opener at Hyderabad, the hosts came back strong in Vizag to get on level footing, leaving the five-match series perfectly poised.

The brilliance of Yashasvi Jaiswal (321 runs) and Jasprit Bumrah (15) allowed India to make a comeback in the series but concerns remain over a misfiring middle-order, which will now be relying on the young talent to deliver the goods.

Skipper Rohit Sharma's form with the bat before the eight-day break only added to the growing concern surrounding the Indian batting, which will be without K L Rahul in this game and Virat Kohli for the entirety of the series.

India's Rohit Sharma during a practice session ahead of the third Test match between India and England *PHOTO: PTI*

Over the last year or so, Rohit's aggressive approach with the bat has not yielded him big scores and the current situation demands the Indian skipper to perhaps contemplate changing gears.

Rahul's unavailability for the third Test has put forth the possibility of Mumbai batter Sarfaraz Khan getting his long-awaited debut in the longest format. The domestic run machine could be teaming up with one-Test-old Rajat Patidar to occupy two of the most coveted batting spots in the middle order. India's glaring inexperience in the middle order would have been well noted by the English camp, whose robust research on opponents and aggressive play has time and again delivered results. Wicketkeeper KS Bharat's persistent failures with the bat have raised the possibility of India turning to Uttar Pradesh's 23-year-old Dhruv Jurel, who is known for his aggressive batting.

With an average of 46.47 in 15 First-Class matches, Jurel has given a fine account of himself. With the pitch here at Rajkot not expected to be a rank turner, a debut here would only help Jurel ease into the world of top-flight cricket.

With local hero Cheteshwar Pujara no more in the plans of the selectors, there will be high anticipation from the local hero Ravindra Jadeja

Mark Wood *PHOTO: X*

to get back into the ring and deliver for India, whose spinners were outmatched by England in the first two Tests.

England have named their playing XI to take on India in the third Test match, starting here on Thursday, with experienced pacer Mark Wood replacing the young spinner Shoaib Bashir.

The third match of the five-game series will mark the 100th Test appearance for English captain Ben Stokes, who will become 16th man to reach a century. England Playing XI: Zak Crawley, Ben Duckett, Ollie Pope, Joe Root, Jonny Bairstow, Ben Stokes (C), Ben Foakes, Rehan Ahmed, Tom Hartley, Mark Wood, James Anderson. —*PTI*

England is not difficult to beat: Ravindra Jadeja

RAJKOT, 15 FEB

Ravindra Jadeja *PHOTO:PTI*

India all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja on Wednesday said England is not a difficult side to beat and the hosts only need to get used to their ultra-attacking style of play to secure the five-match Test series.

England shocked India in the series opener in Hyderabad before the hosts came back strong in Visakhapatnam to get on level footing. The third Test begins here on Thursday.

"I won't term England as (one of the most difficult) teams. It hasn't been easy for other teams to come to India and win. They have an aggressive style of play. We need to get used to that and plan accordingly for them," said Jadeja on the eve of the game.

"If it wasn't for small mistakes in the second innings of the first Test, we wouldn't have lost," said the player who missed the second Test due to a hamstring injury. Jadeja said India needed to stick to their plans and not try playing differently against England's aggressive tactics. "It is better to keep the (bowling) lines as simple as possible in Test cricket because their batters look to play their strokes at every opportunity," he said. "If we adjust according to that, it is possible that we may end up giving more runs and not get wickets as well. We will keep it simple and let them do whatever they want to, we have our game plan and if we stick to it then there are chances of being successful," Jadeja said.

On the injuries he has had to deal with of late, Jadeja said he can't hide himself on the field. "It is frustrating but the cricket has increased these days and that is at the back of the mind always. I can't hide anywhere in the field, I am always on the hotspot in any format and that may be the reason (for injuries).—*PTI*

Rohit to captain India T20I WC

RAJKOT, 14 FEB

Rohit Sharma *PHOTO: PTI*

India will be playing in the T20 World Cup 2024, to be organized in the Caribbean and the USA, under the captaincy of Rohit Sharma, said BCCI secretary Jay Shah at an event here on Wednesday.

India have had Hardik Pandya as their full-time skipper in the shortest format but the heartbreaking loss in the final of the 2023 World Cup to Australia has reignited the murmurs of senior batters Virat Kohli and Rohit returning for the T20 showpiece in June.

"In 2023 (final) at Ahmedabad, even though we did not win the World Cup after 10 straight wins, we won hearts. I want to promise you that in 2024 (T20 World Cup) in Barbados (venue for the final), under Rohit Sharma's captaincy, ham Bharat ka jhanda gaadenge (we will hoist the Indian flag)," Shah said at the end of his speech.

Shah was present at the Saurashtra Cricket Association Stadium in Khanderi, which was renamed after veteran cricket administrator Niranjan Shah, as the chief guest.The event also featured current chief selector Ajit Agarkar, incumbent head coach Rahul Dravid, Rohit, Mohammed Siraj. —*PTI*

SAKSHI AND BAJRANG THREATEN FRESH PROTEST

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

Olympic medal-winning grapplers Sakshi Malik and Bajrang Punia on Wednesday alleged that national federation chief Sanjay Singh used devious means to get the suspension on WFI lifted by United World Wrestling (UWW) and threatened to restart their agitation against the body.The UWW on Tuesday lifted the provisional suspension on India but directed the national federation to provide written guarantees that there would be no discriminatory action against the protesting trio of Punia, Malik, and Vinesh Phogat.The suspension was imposed by UWW in August last year after the WFI failed to hold elections in time.Punia, Malik, and Phogat have been protesting for more than a year, demanding the arrest of former WFI chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh for allegedly sexually harassing women grapplers. —*PTI*

Ramkumar upsets top seed Nardi to reach quarter-finals

BENGALURU, 14 FEB

Ramkumar Ramanathan *PHOTO: PTI*

Indian Davis Cupper Ramkumar Ramanathan made a remarkable comeback to shock top-seeded Luka Nardi to enter the singles quarterfinals of the Bengaluru Open here on Wednesday.

Ramkumar, a wildcard entrant, prevailed over the Italian 1-6, 6-4, 6-4 in little over two hours in their pre-quarterfinal match at the KSLTA Stadium.

The match began on an ominous note for the Indian star as Nardi broke his serve in the very first game of the opening set.

From that point onwards, Ramkumar was not able to offer any kind of fight to his higher-ranked opponent, who used a heavy first serve and precise ground shots to choke his opponent.

While Nardi landed a whopping 86 percent of his first serve inside the box, Ramanathan barely managed to cross the 50 percent mark.

But Ramkumar seemed a transformed player in the second set as he engaged Nardi more effectively in rallies, exploring the deeper areas of the court to keep the Italian pinned on the baseline.

After the first four games went by the serve, Ramkumar earned a crucial break in the fifth game to go 3-2 up and he consolidated the position with a hold to make it 4-2.

The salient feature of Ramkumar's transformed game was the improvement in his first and second services, as he found more zip in them in this set.

Nardi struggled to return Ramkumar's serves that often breached the 200 kmph barriers.

It was evident in the 10th game when Ramkumar served out the second set, as two big serves down the T helped the Indian go level at a set apiece.

Frustration gradually seemed to have crept into Nardi's game as he began to make unforced errors regularly. After matching Ramkumar till the fourth game, Nardi crumbled against sustained pressure in the fifth game. —*PTI*

Sumit Nagal eyes Olympic glory next

BENGALURU, 14 FEB

Sumit Nagal *PHOTO: PTI*

His dream of being inside the global top-100 has been realised but Sumit Nagal is nowhere close to being a content man as the Indian tennis ace says he now faces the challenge of improving or holding on to his standing for direct entry into Grand Slams and the Paris Olympics.

Nagal's victory in the recent Chennai Open propelled him to a career-high world No. 98, and he is the first Indian to achieve the feat since Prajnesh Gunneswaran did that in 2019."Every tennis player dreams about being in the top 100. I have dreamt about being in the top 100 from a very young age and it felt very good when it happened. It was certainly an emotional day after working for years," Nagal told PTI in an interview after his first-round win in the Bengaluru Open on Tuesday night.

The 26-year-old, who is seeded second here, entered the second round of the tournament with a breezy 6-2, 6-2 win over Frenchman Geff Blancaneaux.

But he is not ready to rest on his laurels and has set his eyes on bigger achievements."Yes, it was a big moment (entering top 100). —*PTI*

Osaka hopes for better returns after copying Djokovic style

PARIS, 14 FEB

Naomi Osaka said she had taken a leaf out of Novak Djokovic's tactical playbook and tweaked her return game at the Qatar Open after the former women's world number one earned back-to-back wins for the first time in almost two years.

The 26-year-old from Japan struggled to find her rhythm after returning to the circuit last month following a 15-month break from the tour during which she had her first child. Osaka lost in the second round in Brisbane in her first tournament back before falling at the first hurdle at the Australian Open and in Abu Dhabi.

However, after beating 15th seed Caroline Garcia, who defeated her at Melbourne Park, in the

Naomi Osaka *PHOTO: ANI*

Doha first round she showed glimpses of her best form in a 6-3 7-6(9) win over Petra Martic on Tuesday to reach the last 16. A technical tweak may have helped, she said."I did change my return - I don't want to say 'style' but I guess form. I don't know how to describe it," the four-times Grand Slam champion told reporters.

"Like, before I was taking one step, one step, and then jumping in, but now I'm just jumping in with both feet, because apparently Djokovic does that, so why not copy the best returner in the world?"Osaka, who last won two straight matches at tour level in 2022 at the Miami Open, said that a conversation with coach Wim Fissette sparked the adjustments to her game.

"It was frustrating knowing that my serve is one of the best serves, dare I say, in the world," Osaka added.

"But I just really wanted to work on the things I know should be a lot better and the return was one of them. We were talking about it a lot in the off-season and leaving Melbourne, definitely needed to improve it."Osaka takes on Ukraine's Lesia Tsurenko later on Wednesday. —*AP*

Piedt takes fifer as SA dominate NZ

LONDON, 14 FEB

Dane Piedt *PHOTO: X*

A five-wicket haul by Dane Piedt helped South Africa to dominate New Zealand on Day 2 of the second Test. Before Stumps, New Zealand got bundled out for 211, trailing by 31 runs.

South Africa started the day at 220/6 with Ruan de Swardt and Shaun von Berg standing unbeaten at the crease. However, the Proteas were bundled out for 242 with William ORourke taking a four-wicket haul.

Later, the Kiwis could not shine with the bat as Piedt single-handedly dominated their proceedings. Apart from him, Dane Paterson and Tshepo Moreki scalped three and one wickets respectively.

Stumps New Zealand 211 (Williamson 43, Latham 40, Piedt 5-89, Paterson 3-39) trail South Africa 242 (De Swardt 64, O'Rourke 4-59) by 31 runs. —*AP*

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Pep hails Kevin as Man City cruises towards q/f

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

Kevin De Bruyne was instrumental for Man City *PHOTO: X*

- Pep Guardiola hailed Kevin De Bruyne's form "extraordinary" after the Belgian was involved in all three goals as Manchester City beat FC Copenhagen 3-1 on Tuesday to close in on the Champions League quarter-finals. De Bruyne's early opener was canceled out against the run of play by Magnus Mattsson.

Pep Guardiola hailed Kevin De Bruyne's form "extraordinary" after the Belgian was involved in all three goals as Manchester City beat FC Copenhagen 3-1 on Tuesday to close in on the Champions League quarter-finals. De Bruyne's early opener was canceled out against the run of play by Magnus Mattsson. De Bruyne was sidelined for five months by a hamstring tear suffered on the opening night of the Premier League season in August.

But since his return last month, the 32-year-old has scored two goals and provided seven assists in seven appearances.

"Extraordinary," said Guardiola of De Bruyne's statistics. "The biggest players love to appear on the biggest stages.

"It's the hour of truth when you are in the last 16 of the Champions League and we start well."

The English champions have now won 11 consecutive games in all competitions as they remain on course to repeat last season's treble of the Champions League, Premier League, and FA Cup.

Copenhagen had not played a competitive game for two months since sealing their place in the last 16 by dumping out Manchester United and Galatasaray in the group stages. "They had a great group stage so we had to respect them," said De Bruyne. "We started well but I think we made one mistake and they pounced on it. "We played a really good game. In the second half, we created a lot of chances, could have scored more and luckily in the end we scored the third one, so it is a little bit of an advantage now." —*AP*

Thakur hands over the Chess Olympiad Torch to Budapest

LONDON, 14 FEB

Olympiad Torch *PHOTO: X*

Sports minister Anurag Thakur on Wednesday handed over the Chess Olympiad Torch to Budapest, the Hungarian capital, which will host the 45th edition of the prestigious tournament this year.

During a function at the Dhyanchand National Stadium here, Thakur handed over the torch to the FIDE president Arkady Dvorkovich and representatives of the host city.

The tradition of organizing the torch relay was first initiated by India in June, 2022 ahead of the 44th edition of the Chess Olympiad in Chennai in July-August.

More than 2500 players had taken part in the Olympiad in Chennai and India had finished with nine medals, including historic women's team bronze.

"Chess is an intellectual legacy that India probably offers to the world, and it is not merely a sport, but a reflection of strategic depth and philosophical wisdom. —*PTI*